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THE DETECTIVE'S APPRENTICE

OR,

A Boy Without a Name.

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CHAPTER I.

A VANQUISHED BULLY.

IN the messengers' room of one of the downtown offices of the American District Telegraph Company, in the city of New York, several boys were seated on benches around a glowing stove, each one awaiting his turn to go out into the night; for night it was.

A dismal night it was, too. The wind was blowing a gale, and great sheets of rain splashed and pattered against the gloomy window-panes in a manner that caused the boys to dread a "call" that would send them forth to face the storm.

It had been snowing hard all day, but as night came on, the storm had turned to rain.



A MAN SPRUNG UPON THE YOUNG RUFFIAN AND CLUTCHED HIS SHOULDER WITH A GRIP AS OF STEEL.

and the streets were one great puddle of filthy slush.

"Hello! Dick Smith, how is the walking?" a red-haired boy, who was seated near the stove puffing away at a cigarette, asked of a boy who had just entered the room, and who was casting off his rubber suit.

"It's bad enough, Dan, I can tell you," was the reply. "Look at me, and you can see how it is. I'm mud from my heels to my head."

"Where have you been?"

"I've been up to the Theatre Comique. It seems to be just my luck, to strike long walks in bad weather. And I've got still another turn to make before I can go home. Hang the business, I say! How do I stand now?"

"I guess you're fourth out," answered the red-haired boy, whose name, by the way, was Dan Emmery.

"And who's first out?"

"Hal Vernet."

By this time the boy called Dick Smith had hung up his rubber suit, and taking a seat on one of the benches, he said:

"So, it's your turn next, is it, Hal? Well, I hope you get a short run, for I s'pose it's your last call to-night, ain't it?"

"Yes," replied the boy addressed, without looking up, "I've only one more trip out to-night."

Harold Vernet was a boy fifteen years old, though small for his age, yet a perfect picture of health. He was strong and muscular, had hair and eyes as black as coal, and his open, fearless countenance had a highly intelligent expression. Among his boy companions he was a general favorite, being usually gay and full of spirit; but on this particular night he seemed greatly cast down. He sat with his feet upon the edge of the box of sand, in which the stove stood, his elbows resting on his knees, and his chin supported by the palms of his hands. He was gazing steadily into the fire, but his eyes had an expression which told that his thoughts were far away from the scenes that surrounded him.

"Hal has got the blues to-night, Dick," remarked Dan Emmery. "He hasn't a word for any of us."

"Is that so, Hal?" Dick asked. "Come, old fellow, you must cheer up. Maybe the next call will be only a five-minutes' job, and then you'll be done for the night."

"And maybe," added Hal, "it will be a trip to Harlem. But, it is all the same to me; I don't care where they send me."

"Didn't I say he had the blues?" cried Dan. "What is the trouble anyhow, Hal?"

"Is Aunt Polly worse?" asked Dick. "I know she's been sick quite a long time."

"Haven't you heard about her, boys?" Hal asked, with tears glistening in his eyes as he spoke.

"No," they replied.

"She is dead!"

"Dead! Hal, you're joking!"

"I wish I was, but it is only too true," sadly.

"When did she die?"

"This morning; in the hospital."

"In the hospital! I thought she was at home. You told me she was."

"That was last week," returned Hal. "You know she was sick a long time, and as we had only what I earn here to live on, her money was at last used up. On Monday the landlord turned us out of doors, and Aunt Polly was taken to the hospital, while I had to look out for myself."

"And where are you living?" asked Dan Emmery.

"Nowhere. Monday night I slept in a baker's wagon, in Hester street, and last night I slept in a ten-cent lodging-house, on the Bowery; but to-night I don't know what to do. I haven't got a friend in the world, nor any money."

"Was Aunt Polly your only relative?" asked Dick Smith.

"She was the only friend I ever had," Hal answered, "but she was no relation to me. I always thought she was my aunt, but this morning at the hospital she told me she was not. I don't know who I am."

The poor boy's tears were now flowing freely, and his companions felt the deepest sympathy for him.

"I'm awful sorry for you, Hal," spoke Dick Smith; "but you needn't worry about a place to stay to-night. I'll take you home with me, and then we'll see what mother can do about taking you in for good. But, tell us what Aunt Polly said. If she wasn't your aunt, how did she come to have charge of you?"

"Well, you've been good friends to me, boys," said Hal, "and I don't mind telling you what Aunt Polly told me."

"I went up to the hospital early this morning, to see her, and one of the nurses told me it would be the last time I would ever see Aunt Polly alive. So, I made up my mind to stay right by her as long as she lived. All day, if necessary."

"Aunt Polly knew she was going to die, and told me I would soon be alone in the world."

Here the boy's tears started anew.

"I can't help it, boys," he said; "she was awful good to me."

"That's all right, Hal," sympathized the others, "we know you can't help it."

"Well," Hal presently resumed, "I'll tell you what Aunt Polly told me. She said that she was not my aunt, and that she did not know who I am. She said—"

"Oh! he never had a fadder,

He never had a mudder;

Oh! he never had a sister,

He never had a brudder;

In fact, he's nobody's kid!"

Thus an irreverent voice suddenly interrupted, singing, and the boys all glancing up beheld a messenger who had entered the room a moment before, unobserved, and who had heard what Hal said. He was a large, overbearing sort of fellow, with a pale, cadaverous-looking face that told of dissipation. He was perhaps eighteen or nineteen years of age. His name was James Seeds, but he was better known by an appropriate appellation that had been bestowed upon him—"Seedy Jim."

I have said that Harold Vernet was a favorite among the messenger boys; and yet, because of his popularity, there was one boy who hated him. That one was "Seedy Jim."

"Jim" was the "boss" of the room, 'tis true, but it was owing to his superior brute strength only. He was feared, but not respected. Several of the boys had at different times rebelled against him, but had been beaten soundly for it, and one among these was Hal. The latter had proved himself almost a match for the bully, however, and had made it a hot fight for him.

Therefore, "Seedy Jim" saw that in the near future the place he now usurped was likely to be won by Hal, and hence his hatred.

"Nobody's darling, nobody's pet! Poor little orphan! never had no fadder or mudder," the bully continued, in an aggravating tone no pen can imitate.

Hal's eyes flashed fire, and loud murmurs of sympathy for him were heard from the other boys.

"Poor little child!" the bully went on. "The only son of some unfortunate! Left in a basket on Aunt Polly's doorstep. Poor lit—"

With a cry of rage and a single bound, Hal had sprung over the back of the bench on which he had been seated, grasped "Seedy Jim" by the throat, and cut short the sentence he was uttering.

"You great, overgrown coward!" he cried. "Take that, and that, and that, and *that*, and *that*!" And before the bully could recover from his surprise at the attack, or attempt to defend himself, Hal had dealt him five severe blows squarely in the face.

Then, with a howl of pain, the bully threw himself upon Hal, and tried to crush him to the floor; but he failed in the attempt. Hal's passion was fully aroused, and he fought like a tiger. He still clung to "Jim's" throat, and ere the young ruffian was hardly aware of it, he found himself lying upon his back, with Hal's knees pressing on his breast.

Two or three times he struggled to throw Hal off, but in vain. The latter clung to him, and kept him upon his back, till at last he cried "Enough!" and begged to be allowed to rise.

The other boys were almost transported with joy at seeing "Seedy Jim" vanquished at last.

"Sock it to him!" "Let him have it!" "Paste him!" "Bu'st his nose!" etc., were the cries heard on every side.

"Let me up!" the bully gasped, as Hal loosened his grip on his throat.

"Make him beg, Hal; make him beg!" the other boys all exclaimed.

"I beg! I beg!" gasped "Jim." "I give up beat."

At that moment the manager of the station appeared at the door.

"How many times must I call for a boy?" he demanded. "Where's Hal Vernet?" glancing around. "Fighting, eh? Don't you know the rules here, young man?"

"Hal didn't commence it, sir," explained Dan Emmery. "It was all Jim's fault."

"That's so," declared Dick Smith. "Hal ain't to blame, sir."

"He is to blame!" blurted "Seedy Jim." "I

wasn't a-doin' nothin' to him, an' he jumped onto me an' commenced a-weltin' me."

"You lie! you big coward!" cried all Hal's friends in chorus.

"There! there! that will do," said the manager, who saw how the case stood; "let it drop. If it ever happens again I'll discharge you both. Vernet, it is your turn out. I have called you twice. And you, Seeds, you may go home. You need not come back again before next Monday, either. Your face looks like a prize-fighter's."

It was true. Each of Hal's blows had left its mark. The bully's eyes were almost closed up, his nose was bleeding freely, and one of his cheeks had a deep cut in it.

Hal sprung at once to put on his rubber suit, and the manager went out.

"I'll fix you for this, my beauty!" cried "Seedy Jim," the moment the door was closed. But Hal did not deign to notice him.

"You'd better look out he don't fix you again," warned Dick Smith. "He can do it, every time."

"May be you'd like to try it," "Jim" growled.

"I'll bet I can do it," Dick answered. "We've just found out what a great booby you are."

"And if one of us can't do it two can," asserted Dan Emmery. "Your dog is dead here, you blower."

Hal was now ready to go out, and said:

"Well, boys, this is my last trip. Good-night, if I don't see you again."

"Hold on half a second, Hal," called Dick Smith; "I want to speak to you." And he followed him from the room.

"What is it?" queried Hal.

"Why, what we were talking about. If I ain't here when you come back, you must wait for me. I am going to take you home with me to-night."

"Do you mean it, Dick?"

"Of course I do."

"Then I'll wait for you."

"All right. And, Hal, you'd better keep your eye open for Seedy Jim. He wouldn't hesitate about laying you out, after the way you slugged him."

"I'll look out for him," assured Hal. "I guess he's got enough for a while, though. But, I must move!" And he hurried into the office, leaving Dick to return to the messengers' room.

Meantime, "Seedy Jim," had left the building via a side door.

CHAPTER II.

A COWARD'S REVENGE.

"WHAT were you fighting about, my boy?" the manager of the station asked, as Hal Vernet entered the office, ready for duty.

"Because Seedy Jim was abusing me, sir, and I couldn't stand it."

"Then you should have come and told me."

"I suppose so, sir; but he spoke ill of my mother, whom he never knew. You would have done the same as I did, sir."

"If that was the case, my boy, you did right. Always defend your mother's name. Is your mother dead?"

"I—I think so, sir. I— But please let me go!"

"There, there, my boy; never mind," said the manager, kindly. "I will see that Seeds does not trouble you any more."

"Now, here is a very valuable letter, to go to No—Fifth avenue. Take the Elevated Railroad to Forty-second street, and when you arrive there, do not lose a moment. Hurry from there over to Fifth avenue, find the right number, and deliver the letter to Mrs. Langdon Giles."

"You must not deliver it to any other person, under any circumstances. If the lady is not at home, bring the letter back to me, and I will send it up again to-morrow. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well then, be off with you. Here are your railroad tickets."

Hal took the tickets from the manager's hand, and, having put the letter into his pocket, pulled his cap down tightly on his head and went out into the storm, bending his steps toward the nearest station of the Elevated Railroad.

Poor Hal! his youthful heart was full of sorrow, and his eyes were dimmed by the tears that welled up into them. He now saw the mistake he had made in confiding his secret to his boy companions. He almost wished Aunt Polly had left him in total ignorance, happy in the belief that she was his aunt, and that his parents were dead, as she had often told him in answer to his inquiries concerning them. He could plainly foresee that "Seedy Jim" would use the

weapon he had so unwittingly placed in his hands, to render his life a burden to him.

When he thought of his enemy, however, the boy resolutely dashed away his tears, and his bright eyes flashed.

"Let him take care," he muttered. "If he dares to say a word about me I'll hurt him. I'll give him more than I gave him to-night. I always thought I could whip him, and now I know I can." And elated over his late victory, he partly forgot his troubles for the moment, and stepped forward with a lighter step, disdaining the rain and wind, and the bad walking.

As he hurried along he looked neither to the right nor the left, and certainly not behind him, although it would have been well for him had he done so; for a silent foe was stealthily creeping after him.

Nearer and nearer the follower drew, and, when he now and then passed under the glare of a street-lamp, he might have been recognized as "Seedy Jim." His eyes were gleaming with the fire of hate, his teeth were hard shut, and in his clinched hand he carried some sort of weapon that looked like a short, strong piece of iron.

Wholly unconscious of his great danger, Hal hurried on, taking the shortest route to reach his destination, disregarding the fact that it took him through a very bad and disreputable neighborhood.

It was early in the evening, not later than eight o'clock, perhaps, yet some of these streets through which the messenger passed were almost deserted. Few people cared to be abroad on such a night; and those whom business compelled to be out, kept carefully to the highways of the great city, and shunned its byways.

"Seedy Jim" had but one thought—revenge. For this purpose he had left the station the moment Hal had disappeared from the messengers' room, and having lain in wait for him to come out, was now dogging his steps.

Nearer and nearer to his victim he stole, and presently, right at the corner of another street that was even darker than the one through which Hal was passing, he rushed upon him, not pausing to reflect that he was directly under a street-lamp, and dealt him a blow on the head that knocked him senseless to the ground.

"Ah! you coward!" cried a voice at that instant, and ere "Seedy Jim" could turn to flee, or finish his murderous work, whichever might have been his intention, a man sprang upon the young ruffian and clutched his shoulder with a grip as of steel.

"You young villain!" he cried, angrily, shaking "Jim" almost out of his boots. "I've half a mind to choke you! The idea! attacking a smaller boy than yourself, and in such a cowardly way, too! It's a lucky thing I happened to be coming up this side-street, or perhaps you would have made a job of it. I'll attend to you, sir, in short order," and placing a whistle to his lips, he blew the sharp, shrill police-signal for assistance.

This was Steven Sharp, one of the most able members of the municipal detective corps.

His signal was almost instantly answered from two diverse points, one in the direction of the Bowery, and the other from the dark depths of the street from which the detective had just emerged, and a few moments later two policemen appeared upon the scene.

"What's up?" they asked, recognizing the detective at once.

"Almost a murder, I guess," was the answer. "Please pick that boy up, and see how badly he is hurt."

The two officers lifted Hal up out of the slushy snow, wiped the blood away from his head and face, and then examined his wound.

"He's pretty badly cut," one of them said, at length, "but I guess his skull is all right."

"What did you strike him with anyhow, you young devil?" the detective demanded, giving "Seedy Jim" another hearty shaking. But the young ruffian would not answer.

"I guess this is what he used," said one of the officers, as he stooped down and picked up a short, heavy poker.

"No doubt of it," said the detective. And he added:

"Well, one of you take this fellow and have him locked up, under a charge of assault with intent to kill; while the other helps me to carry this poor boy to the nearest American District Telegraph station."

"All right," said the two policemen, and one of them stepped forward and laid his hand heavily upon "Seedy Jim's" shoulder, at the same time whistling a bar of the then popular air:

"Come, birdie; come, O! come with me."

And he led his prisoner away.

Then the detective and the other policeman lifted Hal up, and together they carried him back to the American District Telegraph Company's office.

When the manager of the station saw him carried into the room, he exclaimed:

"Good heavens! what has happened to that boy?"

"He's been almost murdered," answered the policeman. And the detective added:

"He was set upon a few minutes ago by one of his fellow-messengers, who struck him a severe blow on the head with this poker, sir."

"Why," cried the manager, excitedly, "that poker belongs in the messengers' room of this station!" And instantly he left his place and rushed into that department.

"Where's Seeds?" he demanded.

"He's gone home, sir," replied Dick Smith.

"How long since?"

"He went out about the same time that Hal Vernet did," answered Dan Emmery.

"Oh! the villain!" the excited manager gasped, as he turned and hurried back into his office; and the boys, seeing that something unusual was afoot, followed him.

As they entered, Hal was just returning to consciousness, and opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Oh, Hal! what is the matter?" cried Dick Smith, as he rushed to his friend's side and knelt down by him.

"That rascally Seeds has tried to murder him, that's what's the matter," cried the manager, with whom Hal was a great favorite.

"Is that so?" Dan Emmery shouted. "Oh, won't we salt him for it, boys?"

"We'll half-kill him!" declared Dick Smith.

"No need to talk of revenge, boys," said the man who had, with the policeman, brought Hal in, and who was a stranger to them. "The fellow is good for six months on the Island, and I'll see that he gets it, too."

"Did you witness the blow struck, sir?" the manager asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "I happened to be coming up one street as this lad came down another, and as I neared the corner he came in sight under a street-lamp. Then, almost at the same instant, the other boy rushed upon him and struck him down. It was as cowardly a deed as I ever witnessed."

"Who was it struck me?" asked Hal.

"It was Seedy Jim," replied Dick Smith.

"Oh, the coward!"

"May I ask your name, sir?" the manager asked of the detective.

"Certainly; I am Steven Sharp, of the detective bureau."

"Indeed! I've often heard of you, sir, and I'm proud to meet you."

And the manager offered his hand, while the boys all gazed upon the officer with a feeling akin to awe.

The detective took the proffered hand, and then asked:

"Where does this boy live?"

"Please, sir, he is going to my home to-night," Dick Smith hastily announced.

"But he is wounded," said the detective, "and he had better be taken to his own home."

"I haven't any home, sir," said Hal.

"No home?" the detective mused—"no home? and such a fine-looking lad, too!" And then aloud:

"Then hadn't we better send you to the hospital, my boy?"

"Nary time!" said Dick Smith, boldly; "he's going to my home, sir. I guess my mother can take care of him, if any one can."

"And where do you live?" the detective asked.

Dick gave his address.

"Do you want to go home with Dick, Hal?" the manager asked.

"Yes, sir," Hal answered faintly, for he was very weak.

The detective told the policeman to go and send a cab, and then return to his beat.

"All right, sir," said the officer, and he went out.

"Say, boys," Dick Smith asked, meantime, "which of you will take my last turn to-night? I must go home to take care of Hal."

"I will, I will," was the answer from all.

"Yes," said the manager, "you may go, Dick, and—But, give me that letter, Hal. I must send another boy with it at once. It had slipped my mind."

Hal raised himself up on his elbow on the bench where he had been laid, and felt in his pocket.

"Oh! sir, I've lost it!" he cried.

"Lost it?"

"Yes, sir; it was in this pocket; but now it's gone."

"Maybe Seedy Jim has took it," Dan Emmery suggested.

"Impossible," said the detective. "He had no sooner struck the boy than I was upon him. If the boy has lost a letter, it must be lying where he fell."

"That's so," the manager assented. "Go, two of you, with a lantern and find it."

Two messengers were soon ready, with a small lantern, and the detective telling them where to go, they set out on a run.

Hal Vernet gradually recovered from the shock of the blow he had received, and by the time the cab arrived for him, he was able to stand up and walk, with a little assistance.

He, Dick and Detective Sharp entered the conveyance, and telling the driver where to go, were driven rapidly away.

In due time the two boys who had been sent to look for the lost letter, returned to the station.

"Well?" the manager interrogated.

"We can't find it, sir," the boys reported. "We've looked all over the spot carefully, but it was not there."

"And you looked all along the way, where Mr. Sharp said Hal was carried?"

"Yes, sir; every step."

"And on the same side of the street?"

"Yes, sir."

"Haden't you better go back and look again?"

"It wouldn't be of any use, sir. We looked over every inch of the ground."

The letter was lost, beyond recovery. What had become of it?

You shall see.

Steven Sharp and the policeman, carrying Hal Vernet, had been gone from the scene of the cowardly assault scarcely five minutes, when a young man passed along that way.

"Blood, eh?" he had muttered, as he paused under the street-lamp and looked around at the crimson marks that had attracted his attention. "Looks as though there has been some sort of fracas here."

"Hello! there's a letter!" and stooping, he had picked up a large, well-filled yellow envelope.

"Wonder what it is?" he had queried. "Let's see—" and he held it where the light fell upon the superscription—"Mrs. Langdon Giles, No. —, Fifth avenue, N. Y. Personal."

"Whew! that's rather a high-toned address, anyhow. Now, I wonder what's in this envelope? Something that's soft, and something that's hard, too. Who knows but what I've stumbled upon a gold-mine—a veritable bonanza? I'll investigate the contents of this mysterious packet, when I get home." And so saying, he had thrust the wet letter into his pocket and gone on his way.

His last sentence proved the character of the man into whose hands the lost letter had fallen.

CHAPTER III.

HAL FINDS FRIENDS.

"WELL, my lad, how do you feel now?" Detective Sharp asked of Hal Vernet, as the cab started.

"Better than I did, I thank you, sir," was the reply. "My head pains me very much, though."

"Of course, it must; but I guess that will come all right in a day or two. What did I understand your name is?"

"My name is Harold Vernet, sir."

"And yours?" turning to Dick Smith.

"My name is Smith, sir; not a common name at all, but an exceedingly popular one; Richard Smith. Dick, for short."

The detective smiled.

"I see you are inclined to be facetious," he said.

"Faseeshus?" Dick repeated, "I don't exactly get onto that word, I guess; but that was what I heard a dude a-saying to his mash, one night last summer. His name was Smith, you see."

"Well, it is rather a 'popular' name, if you look at it in that light," the detective remarked. "But, tell me, my lad," turning to Hal, "what is there at the bottom of this attack upon you to-night? What was it done for?"

"Well, sir, Seedy Jim has always been bullying us boys around, just as he pleased, and this evening I turned on him and gave him a licking. He was abusing me, and I couldn't stand it. I suppose he took this means of getting square with me for it."

"No doubt of it. That is a coward's way, every time," the detective declared. "We'll fix him for it though."

"By the way, I think I shall call around to—"

morrow, my boy, and see how you are. I like your face."

"Oh! I shall be at the station to-morrow, all right again!" Hal exclaimed.

"No, my lad, I am afraid not; you won't be there to-morrow. When you wake up in the morning, your head will feel as big as a bushel. You'll be glad to lie around the house for a day or two, at least."

"I hope not, anyhow," said Hal.

And thus they talked while the cab rolled on toward its destination.

Dick Smith's home was in an east-side tenement house, high up toward the heavens, and consisted of four rooms. His mother was a widow. She had three sons. The oldest was Harry, a printer by trade; Dick stood next; and then came their little brother Joe, who sold papers, morning and evenings, and went to school.

Mrs. Smith was an honest, hard-working woman, who kept her rooms "as clean and neat as a new pin." She took in washing, and occasionally went out to do house-cleaning; and thus, with the aid of her boys, made quite a comfortable living.

On this stormy night, about the time that Hal Vernet was being brought to her home in the cab, she was seated beside the glowing kitchen stove, with Harry and little Joe.

Joe had come in only a short time before, as wet as a drowned rat, and his clothes, cap, shoes, and stockings were hanging up to dry behind the stove, while he was busily engaged with his school lessons for next day. Harry was glancing at the items of news in an evening paper, and the widow herself was patching a pair of little Joe's trousers.

"What an awful night it is!" the widow presently exclaimed, as the wind came roaring down into the chimney with a louder moan than usual, and the rain splashed against the windows with greater force. "I do hope Dick won't be out late."

"Now, don't you go to worrying about Dick, mother," said little Joe. "He's all right."

"Why, here he comes now!" the mother suddenly cried, as she heard and recognized his well-known step. And the next instant Dick burst into the room, carrying a bundle, and followed a moment later by Detective Sharpe, assisting Hal.

At this sudden entering of a stranger, little Joe, who had been sitting in his night-gown, sprung up and instantly vanished into another room.

"Mother," Dick cried, pitching the bundle into a convenient corner and then facing round. "This is Hal Vernet. You've often heard me speak of him. He's been hurt to-night, and he's got no home, so I brought him here. This man is a police detective. He saved Hal from being hurt worse than he is, if not killed."

Harry rose up and placed a chair for the detective, while Mrs. Smith assisted Hal to a seat in her rocking-chair.

"And that was right, Dick," the good woman said. "How did the poor boy get hurt?"

"He was attacked by a young ruffian, who truck him with a poker," Detective Sharp hastened to explain. "I wanted him to go to a hospital; but your boy insisted upon having him brought here."

"And that was right," the widow repeated. "Dick has often spoken of him. But, I thought he was living with his aunt, Dick; and now you say he has no home. How is that?"

"Aunt Polly is dead, ma'am," said Hal.

"Yes," said Dick, "she is dead. She died this morning in the hospital, and Hal has no home any more. He had no place to sleep to-night."

"Oh! the poor boy!" the widow exclaimed. "And such a fine-looking lad, too. He is welcome here, I am sure."

"There! I knew you'd say that, mother," cried Dick, joyfully.

"I, too, am glad to hear you say it, madam," said the detective. "I am quite interested in the lad, and will call and see how he is to-morrow, with your permission. Give him good care, and if a doctor is needed you may get one at my expense. Now, I will bid you all good-night. The cab that brought us here is still at the door, and I will let the driver earn his fare by taking me home."

"He shall have the best of care, sir," said Mrs. Smith, "and I will be glad to have you call and see him."

"I will certainly do so," said the detective.

"Well, good-night, all! Good-night, my boy."

"Good-night, sir," said Hal.

When the detective was gone, the widow examined Hal's hurt. Then she got a basin of warm water, and carefully washed the blood

away from his head and face, after which she anointed the wound with a cooling ointment, and bandaged it up.

"There!" she exclaimed, when she had done, "how does that feel?"

"Oh! ever so much better, I thank you, ma'am," Hal replied.

"I'm glad of that. Now, I will find some dry clothes for you, and when you have put them on, you and Dick shall have supper."

In a short time, with the help of Dick and Harry, Hal was clad in dry garments, and then he felt so much like himself again that he sat up to the table and ate almost as heartily a supper as Dick.

"So, your aunt is dead, eh?" the widow presently questioned.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Hal.

"I am very sorry. Dick spoke to me about her being sick. Was she sick long?"

"Yes, ma'am; quite a long time."

"And was she your only relative?"

"Yes, ma'am; that is she was my only friend; she was not my aunt though."

"Not your aunt?"

"No, ma'am; she was no relation to me at all. She told me so this morning."

"Who, then, were your parents?"

"I—I don't know, ma'am."

"There, never mind," said the good woman, kindly. "I was wrong to ask you so many questions. Will you take another cup of tea?"

"No, I thank you," Hal answered.

"See here, Hal," said Dick, who saw that he desired to say something, "you needn't be afraid now to talk. There's no Seedy Jim here."

"Dick! be quiet," said the widow. "Don't you see it pains him to speak of his dead friend?"

"No matter, ma'am," said Hal. "I thank you, but there is something I must explain. I must tell you what Aunt Polly said to me this morning. I cannot stay here to-night unless I do tell you, and perhaps when you have heard it you will not want me here anyhow."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the widow. "If there is something you must tell me, at least put it off till to-morrow. As for not wanting you here—do you see the Good Book there on that shelf? I do my duty according to that, as near as I can."

"And the right of that Book, which Aunt Polly has read to me so often," said Hal, "makes me feel all the more that it would be wrong for me to sleep in your house without first telling you my secret. If you will listen, I will tell you now."

"Very well, then, since you will have it so; we are listening."

In his own peculiar, ingenuous manner, Hal then told his story:

"I have lived with Aunt Polly Barker ever since I can remember, and always thought she was my aunt; but this morning she told me she was not."

"She said that one day as she was on her way home from market, with her big basket on her arm, a woman stopped her on the street and asked if she would hold her baby for a moment."

"That baby was myself."

"Aunt Polly took me, and in an instant the woman darted out of sight around a corner of the street. She never came back."

"Aunt Polly started after her, of course; but, having me on one arm and her big basket on the other, by the time she reached the corner the woman was out of sight."

"Well, what could Aunt Polly do? You know how kind-hearted she was, Dick; and she said she couldn't find it in her heart to hand me over to the city as a foundling, so she took me home with her."

"Her husband was living then, and she had a comfortable home. They had no children of their own, having lost two little boys some years before, and gave me the best of care."

"At first, of course, they tried to find out who I was; but they failed. Then they looked around for a name for me. Their own little boys had been named Harold and Vernet, and at last it was decided to bestow both of those names upon me. That's how I came to be Harold Vernet."

"When I was about ten years old, Mr. Barker died; and then Aunt Polly had to take me away from school, and put me to work, to help her get along."

"At first I tried blacking boots, then selling papers, and at last I got a job as messenger in the A. D. T. Company, where I have been for two years."

"Aunt Polly had to work very hard, but we managed to get along right nicely, until she was

taken sick. Then all we had to live on was what I earned; and in a short time the little money that Aunt Polly had laid by was used up. The landlord turned us out of doors last Monday, and then Aunt Polly was taken to the hospital."

"And what in the world did you do then, poor boy?" asked Mrs. Smith.

"Well, ma'am, I had to do the best I could. That night I slept in a baker's wagon, and last night, in a ten-cent lodging-house; but to-night I don't know what I would have done, only for Dick. I thought of trying to find a hole somewhere in that big pile of boxes at the corner of Elm and Pearl streets. I hadn't a friend in the world, nor any money."

"Poor boy!"

"You see, ma'am, I am a boy who does not know who he is. Now, are you still willing to have me stay here to-night?"

"Why, to be sure I am," answered the good woman. "Would I be a Christian woman if I turned you away? Besides, you are not to blame. You have done nothing to be ashamed of, and some day you may discover who your parents were."

"I hope so," said Hal. "I mean to try, anyhow, as soon as I am old enough."

"Have you any clew to go to work on?" asked Harry, who looked toward the practical side of the question.

"Oh! yes; I meant to tell you!" Hal exclaimed. "I went up to the hospital this morning to see Aunt Polly, and knowing she couldn't live she told me what I have just told you. Then she gave me a small package, and was trying to say something more, when she died. Then one of the nurses led me away."

"And have you opened the package yet?" Mrs. Smith quickly asked, her womanly curiosity now fully aroused.

"Yes," Hal replied, "and it contained some baby clothes, undoubtedly the ones I wore when I was given to Aunt Polly."

"Are there any marks or letters on them?" asked Harry.

"No; but they give me a clew to go to work on, and I mean to use it some time. The little dress has been cut in two, up the back and front, and just half of it is gone. Then there is half of a little gold chain, the other half being missing."

"And," said Harry, "you think the other part of the dress and the other piece of the chain are held by some one, to prove your identity?"

"That's it, exactly," replied Hal, "although I couldn't have explained it so easily. The things are at the station, in a bundle of clothes that I've got there, and—"

"No they ain't either," cried Dick. "There's your bundle, there in the corner. I knew it was yours, and brought it along."

"I'm glad you thought of it," said Hal. "But, why didn't you say something about it before? Then your mother wouldn't had the trouble of getting clothes for me." And as he spoke he rose and got the bundle, opened it, and taking from it the small package he had spoken of, he handed it to Mrs. Smith, requesting her to examine the contents.

The widow opened it, and spread the garments out upon the table.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "these are of the very finest materials! Whoever your mother was, my boy, she must have been well-to-do."

"Do you think so, ma'am?"

"I am sure of it. No woman of limited means could have bought such garments. Why, this little cloak must have cost at least twenty dollars itself." And she held the article up as she spoke.

"Hold that up again, mother," said Harry. "I saw something."

The widow obeyed, and Harry then glanced through the little cloak toward the light.

"There!" he exclaimed, "I was sure of it!" And stepping forward and taking up one corner of the garment, he felt of it carefully, saying:

"There is a bit of paper in there, mother."

"So there is," said the widow, excitedly. "I wonder what it can be?" and she searched for some place to get it out.

Presently she discovered a small rip in one of the seams of the lining, and the paper was soon brought to light. It proved to be a small piece of heavy note-paper, one side of which was covered with writing.

Harry took it from his mother's nervous hand, and after looking it over for a moment, read aloud:

"Be kind to this boy for his father's sake. Keep his little clothes and this note. I retain half of his dress and chain. You keep the other half of each for him."
H. V."

"Those letters stand for my name!" exclaimed Hal, excitedly.

"Why, so they do," cried Harry. And then they all stood and gazed upon the slip of paper in silent wonderment.

What could it mean? Harold Vernet had been named after Mrs. Barker's two boys, Harold and Vernet, yet here were his very initials, H. V., signed to this mysterious note.

It was a remarkable coincidence, to say the least.

CHAPTER IV. HAL'S NEW HOME.

"It is rather a strange circumstance, anyhow," said Harry Smith, who was the first to break the silence, "that these letters should happen to be the same as the initials of your name. If that detective friend of yours were only here now, boy, he might be able to solve the riddle for us."

"Indeed, I believe he could," Mrs. Smith confidently declared. "Did you notice his eyes?—sharp enough to look right through you, and almost read your thoughts?"

"Oh! he's a sharp one, you bet he is," said Dick. "But, see here, mother, what about Hal?"

"What about Hal? My son, I don't understand you."

"Well, I mean can you take him to live with us for good?"

"Oh! why, yes, to be sure I can. Do you suppose I would turn him away? Of course he may live here. But, let me see. I must have another bed. I—"

"Please, ma'am," Hal exclaimed, interrupting her, "some of Aunt Polly's things are at a Mrs. O'Brien's, down in Catherine street, and there's a bed among them. Mrs. O'Brien took possession of them when Aunt Polly was taken to the hospital, saying she would keep them till called for; but I know she intends to keep them for good. She is as mean as can be. She lives in the same house that we lived in, and never did a thing for Aunt Polly at all, all the time she was sick. When we were turned out of doors though, because Aunt Polly couldn't pay the rent, then she took the things. I had to make an awful fuss, to get my own clothes."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith, sarcastically, striking an attitude with her arms akimbo, "Lady O'Brien was very thoughtful, I am sure. She'll keep the things till called for, will she? Well, then, my boy, you and I will do ourselves the honor of calling on her ladyship to-morrow. What has she got that belonged to Aunt Polly?"

"Well, ma'am, there's not a great deal. You see, Aunt Polly had to sell a great many things. There is a good bed though, and a table, a small stove, two, or three chairs, an old trunk, and a clock. And, if you are going to give me a home, ma'am, the things belong to you."

"Not, not to me, but to you," said the widow. "And you shall have them, too. She'll keep them till called for, will she? Well, I admire her cheek, I must say. I'll see Lady O'Brien to-morrow, and if she don't give up the things, I'll—I'll—"

"You'll snatch her bald-headed, eh, mother?" said Dick.

"That I will, and more. I'll teach her— But, I am losing my temper."

"Yes, my boy; you shall have a home here. I'll take you as one of my own, and do the same by you as by Dick."

"I am very thankful to you, ma'am," Hal said.

"I am only doing a Christian woman's duty," said the widow. "Haden't you better go to bed though? You need rest. You will have to sleep with Harry to-night, but to-morrow I will arrange things so that you and Dick can room together."

And thus Hal found himself in a new home, among kind friends.

Mrs. Smith carefully folded the baby-clothes, wrapped them up, and at Hal's request laid them away in a safe place. Then Hal retired to bed, where he soon forgot his troubles and fell asleep.

When he awoke next morning he found, contrary to the prediction of Detective Sharp—who knew nothing of the wonderful therapeutic qualities of Mrs. Smith's favorite ointment, that the soreness was almost entirely gone from his head.

"I guess I'm as sound as ever," he said to Dick, at breakfast. "I wonder how Seedy Jim feels?"

"I'll bet he's got a sweet-looking pair of eyes, anyhow," replied Dick. "Are you going to work to-day?"

"Of course I am. How is the weather?"

"It has cleared off," answered Mrs. Smith, "and the air is fresh and keen."

"That's good!" cried little Joe. "I don't like to sell papers in wet weather."

It was barely daylight, and they were eating their breakfast by the light of a candle.

"By the way, Hal, what is Mrs. O'Brien's number in Catherine street?" Mrs. Smith presently asked.

Hal told her the number, and she said:

"I will go and see her to-day. Perhaps she means well enough by taking care of the things."

"Perhaps," said Hal; "but I doubt it. I know her."

As soon as breakfast was over, little Joe set out to sell his morning papers, and in due time Harry, Dick and Hal went to their work, leaving Mrs. Smith alone to attend to hers.

The good woman busied herself with her household duties for an hour or two, then she carried home some clothes which she had ironed on the previous day. She returned about ten o'clock, and was just getting ready to go in quest of Mrs. O'Brien, when there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," she said, and Detective Sharp stepped into the room.

"Good-morning," he said. "How is our young friend?"

"Good-morning, sir," said the widow; "please be seated. You mean the boy? Oh, he is all right, sir; he went off to his work as well as he ever was."

"Indeed! I expected to find him feeling pretty sore; he is a hardy little chap, and no mistake. He told me he thought he would be out all right this morning, but I did not think so. I'm glad to hear it, though. I understood, last night, that he has no relatives. Is it true?"

"Well, sir, I can't tell. If he has any, no one knows who they are."

And then the widow repeated Hal's story.

The detective listened attentively, and when she had concluded her recital, he said:

"Will you allow me to see those little garments, madam?"

"Certainly, sir, for I believe you really take an interest in the poor boy."

"I am interested in him. If I can do him a good turn, I shall do it most willingly. Perhaps chance may throw something in my way and put me on the right track to discover who he is."

"I hope so, sir," said the widow, earnestly.

And then she produced the package Hal had left in her keeping, spreading its contents out upon the table before her visitor, who examined each article closely.

"No marks," he said, presently; "yet this little dress is cut in half, and part of it is gone, as is half of this chain. Now, the question is: Where are they?"

Mrs. Smith called his attention to the note.

"Well this is a mystery," he declared. "Who can 'H. V.' be? Not the boy's mother—I'll bet on that!"

"Why, sir?"

"Because a mother would naturally say, 'Be kind to my boy,' and this says, 'Be kind to this boy.' Then, too, why does it say, 'for his father's sake?' It is a deep mystery."

"You see, sir," said the widow, "the letters 'H. V.' stand for Harold Vernet."

"Yes; and that goes to prove that Aunt Polly Barker found this note, same as you did; at least, that is my way of looking at it. 'Who is H. V.?' she has said to herself or to her husband, no doubt. 'It must be the baby's mother, and we must give him a name according to the initials. What shall it be?' Then, as they thought of the names of their own boys—Harold and Vernet—there was the name for the little stranger."

"It certainly looks reasonable enough, anyhow," said the widow. "I wonder why we couldn't think of that last night?"

"There is a shadow hanging over that boy's life, which, the chances are, will never be lifted," the detective said. "But, if ever I find a clew to work on, I'll make it my business to clear the mystery up. I am deeply interested in the little fellow. I must be going though. You were on the point of going out when I came, were you not?"

Mrs. Smith explained where she was going.

"If you have no objections, I'll go with you," he said. "I may be of some assistance to you."

"Of course I have no objections, sir. In fact, I am glad you will go; for, to tell the truth, I fancy Mrs. O'Brien will need to see a police badge before she will come to terms."

The two set out, and in a short time reached

their destination. Mrs. Smith then inquired for the woman she desired to see, and found her.

"Are you Mrs. O'Brien, ma'am?" she asked.

"Yis," was the reply, "that's me name, mu'm."

"Well, Mrs. O'Brien, I have called to get some things that belonged to Mrs. Polly Barker, who lived in this house. I believe you are taking care of them till called for, are you not?"

"An' who are you, mu'm?"

"My name is Mrs. Smith. I have taken Aunt Polly's little boy, Hal, to live with me, and have come here for the things she left, which, of course, are his."

"Av coorse they are not, thin!" cried Mrs. O'Brien, angrily. "A foine lad av a b'y he is, to have poor Jimmie Seeds locked up last noight, an' all fer nothin' at all, at all. Shure, th' lad's poor ould mither told me all about it this mornin'. Not a thing will ye be afther gettin', mu'm! Afther th' way I cared fer that woman while she was sick, an' th' money I spint on her, it's a howlin' shame if her few odds an' ends av fureynchure don't belong to me. Divil a bit av it you'll git, mu'm."

"A great deal you cared for the poor woman, you drunken thing!" cried the widow. "You, who allowed her to be turned out of house and home, here in the dead of winter. A great deal of money you spent for her comfort. Bah! I'm disgusted!"

"You're no lady, mu'm!" cried the Irish woman, shaking her fist under the widow's nose. "You're no lady!"

"I don't claim to be!" was the angry reply, and the widow thrust her face forward till her nose almost touched Mrs. O'Brien's, "but I hope I'm a Christian woman, who would never think of robbing a poor boy and then turning him homeless into the street!"

Then both women began to talk at once, shaking their heads the while, with their noses almost touching; but what one said, or what the other said, will never be known. Both grew very red in the face, and it was fortunate, perhaps, that Detective Sharp soon appeared upon the scene, accompanied by a policeman.

Mrs. O'Brien drew in her horns at once.

The goods were quickly forthcoming, and the detective having engaged a truck, which was ready at the door, they were loaded at once and taken away.

"If you have kept anything back, madam," said the detective, "you will see the inside of the Tombs before you are aware of it."

"Oh! you've got th' trash, every bit av it!" the Irishwoman declared.

"Very good, then."

"Good-day, ma'am," said Mrs. Smith, as she left the house.

"Good-day, an' good riddance to ye!" Mrs. O'Brien retorted. "An' ye'd better tell that precious b'y to look out fur Jimmie Seeds, whin he comes out."

"Which won't be for six months to come, I can assure you," said the detective.

"You're no gentleman, you ain't! An' as fer you, ye bla'guard," she cried, suddenly confronting the policeman, with a rolling-pin firmly grasped in her hand, "there's th' dure!"

The officer departed.

True enough, "Seedy Jim" was sentenced to sojourn for six months on the "Isle de Blackwell," which was no more than the young ruffian richly deserved.

Hal found his new home to be a pleasant one, and he soon became as one of the family. He and Dick had a room together, and their friend Dan Emmery was often invited to come and see them.

Detective Sharp now and again dropped in to see his young *protege*, as he called Hal, and they frequently met upon the busy streets. On several occasions Hal performed services for the detective in his line of business, for which he was always amply rewarded.

But Hal was a strange boy. The secret that hung over him and clouded his young life, caused him to be silent and reserved to an unusual degree for a boy of his age.

The weeks passed quickly by; winter was succeeded by spring, and spring by summer; and soon six months had elapsed since the night of "Seedy Jim's" cowardly attack upon the hero of my story.

CHAPTER V. CLOUDS ARISING.

DROP from Chatham Square into Mott street, reader, and you will suddenly find yourself in the Chinese quarter of the great metropolis, where, in all his pristine beauty, "John" reigns supreme.

Proceed along this street for a short distance, and presently, on your left, you will behold a narrow thoroughfare that leads directly down a steep hill. This is Park street.

Turn the corner here and descend the hill, and a few steps will bring you into Mulberry street, where you will suddenly find yourself in the Italian quarter of the city. Here, in all their rags and dirt, are to be found the dark-skinned children of sunny Italy, who still adhere, in a great measure, to the habits and customs peculiar to their native land.

Continue on down Park street for another block, and you will come into Baxter street, that stronghold of the Jews. Here, if your general make-up proclaims you to be from the country, not a dozen steps will you advance ere you will be caught by the sleeve, and almost pulled out of your boots by some enterprising dealer in "ol' clo's," who seems to be determined to force a sale upon you at almost any sacrifice.

"I giff you mein vort as a chentlemans," he will assure you, "dot suit cost me not one cent less as *eight dollars!*" Yet, the chances are, unless you prove so verdant as to pay his first-named price, he will eventually part with that same suit for *two* dollars, and still realize a handsome profit.

And here, too, you will find yourself at the Five Points, that world-famous scene of many a bloody brawl, and of more murders than one. Here Baxter, Park and Worth streets conjoin, and the small, triangular-shaped park, if park it may be called, known as "Paradise Square," lies before you.

There was a time, and that time was not a great many years ago, when, for a well-dressed stranger to venture into this region of vice, misery and crime, was to risk his life. It is little better now, after dark, for the neighborhood still abounds with native and foreign villains of every degree.

The Five Points is not what it was in the days of the "Old Brewery," however, for on the site of that once notorious building stands now the Five Points House of Industry, while directly opposite is the Five Points Mission.

Nevertheless, if you desire to investigate these scenes for yourself, and are a stranger to the city, let your visit be made in the full light of day, and not after the shades of night have fallen.

About ten o'clock one night, a little more than six months after the time of which the opening chapters of this romance treat, a young man crossed Chatham Square, entered Mott street, and proceeded at a rapid pace along the very route which I have just described.

He was perhaps thirty years of age, a little above the middle height, of good figure, rather good-looking than otherwise, and fairly well-dressed. His face was dark, and his hair and eyes were decidedly black. His eyes had a constant restless expression, however, and he glanced furtively around, as though on the watch.

This man was one Macy Blanding, by profession a gambler, sporting-man and "sharper" in general. He was tolerably well-educated, and, had he turned his talents in the right direction, might have won an honorable place in the world. He had, however, a propensity toward evil. On more than one occasion his name had been associated with "affairs" of questionable character, but thus far the police had failed to bring him to account. He was shrewd, brave, and decidedly "slippery."

On reaching Park street he turned and descended the hill, and had almost gained Mulberry street, when suddenly two men sprung upon him from a dark doorway, and a knife flashed before his eyes.

"Your money! *queek, or ve keel you!*" was hissed into his ears, with a strong foreign accent.

There was no reply, only a sharp, clicking sound, and instantly a revolver gleamed in the dull light, staring the assailants squarely in the face. And, foreigners though they were, they were evidently acquainted with the death-dealing qualities of this favorite weapon of the American, for they quickly slunk back and allowed the young man to pass.

Crossing Mulberry street, he continued on to the Five Points. Here he turned to the right, around one of the sharp points that constitute the five, proceeded for a short distance up Baxter street, and then disappeared into one of the disreputable saloons, or "bungaloes," that there abound.

Let us follow him.

The room into which he had entered was by no means large, and its ceiling was decidedly low. At one end was the bar, presided over by

one Mike O'Glory, the proprietor of the place. The rest of the floor was devoted to tables and chairs, for the use of customers.

The place was well-filled with a vile-looking crowd, men and women, some of whom were much the worse from drink. The least evil-appearing of those present were seated at the tables nearest the bar, while the rabble occupied the opposite end of the room.

Near the door were two Italian boys, playing a harp and violin.

Macy Blanding advanced at once to the bar, and said:

"A glass of beer, Mike, and one for yourself."

"All right, sir," responded the barkeeper, as he wiped the perspiration from his face, and then proceeded to fill two glasses with the popular foaming beverage. "It's a pretty warm evenin'."

"Decidedly so," answered Blanding. "Well, here's to your health, old man," he added, when the beer was placed before him, and raising his glass he drained it at a draught.

"Same to you," said O'Glory, and he followed suit.

"Have you seen Sheeny the Turk to-night, Mike?" Blanding then asked, as he put down the empty glass and wiped his mouth.

"Yes; he was in here only a little while ago. He said he'd be in again. Acted as though he expected to meet some one."

"He was looking for me. I've got an appointment with him to meet me here. I'll take a seat and wait for him." And so saying, Blanding sat down by one of the tables near the bar and lighted a cigar.

In a short time another individual entered the saloon, glanced around, and then approached the table where Macy Blanding was seated.

"Good-evenin', pard," he said, as he sat down, "how d'ye flourish?"

"Oh! so-so, Sheeny," was the reply, "how's yourself?"

"Can't complain."

This new-comer was a man about forty years of age. His hair was black and closely cropped; his eyes were small, black, and piercing; his face was cleanly shaven, and of a sickly, yellow-white color; while his nose, his most prominent and striking facial feature, proclaimed him to be unmistakably a Jew, or at least of Jewish descent. Furthermore, his countenance wore the hunted expression that bespeaks the jail-bird. Such in fact he was.

His name was Levi Moses, though he was better known as "Sheeny the Turk." He had spent at least two terms in Sing Sing, and several on Blackwell's Island, having just been set free from the last-named place, after nine months of incarceration.

Beer was called for, and then, as they drank and smoked, the two men conversed in low tones.

"Now, Blanding; what about my boy Ikey? Where is he?" "Sheeny the Turk" asked.

"That, Sheeny, is just what I wanted to see you about," Blanding replied. "You remember the night you saved my life in that Water street den, about two years ago, I promised you if ever I could do you a good turn, I would."

"Well, when you went to board on the Island this last time, and your wife died shortly afterward, I took your boy in and gave him a home."

"Now, I want to ask you a question: Suppose it came to your knowledge that a certain rich man, a regular nabob millionaire, had had a boy stolen from him—say about fourteen years ago, the boy then being but a year-old baby. Suppose you found it in your power to palm off your boy Ikey upon the said millionaire, with proof to convince him that Ikey was his lost boy, thus giving your son a good home and making him heir to millions, would you do it?"

"Would I?" "Sheeny the Turk" exclaimed, "of course I would."

"I thought so. Well, Sheeny, allow me to inform you that your boy Ikey is now figuring in that role."

"The deuce you say?"

"Exactly so. Listen: Some time ago I made the discovery that a certain wealthy family had lost a boy as mentioned. I found means of proving your boy Ikey to be *their* boy, now fifteen years of age. I resolved to palm him off upon them. I put Ikey through a severe course of lessons, which occupied some three months or more of time. Then I took him to the certain wealthy family aforesaid."

"I put on an almost sanctimonious air; took the boy by the hand and went boldly to the rich man's palatial mansion; laid my proofs before the master of the house and his wife as I told my story, and then said: 'This boy is your long-lost son.'

"They were convinced. They could not help being convinced. They questioned Ikey closely, but his replies only strengthened my story the more. And then the proofs, they were not to be doubted. They were *half of the little dress that their baby had on when stolen, and part of a little gold chain that was around its neck.*"

"You see, I had them dead to rights. Ikey is a good-looking little cuss, smart as lightning, and they took to him at once. The fond mother clasped him to her breast, while the father showered blessings upon my head. It was truly affecting."

"You're a fool!" cried the "Turk." "I'd have bled them! I'd 'a' made 'em pony up a cool thousand for th' proofs, and several more before I'd allowed 'em to see th' boy!"

"Not so fast, Sheeny, old boy; not so fast. If I had tried that game, the rich man I speak of would have been suspicious. He would more than likely have put detectives upon my track, and have exploded my little job."

"Oh! no, Sheeny; I played for a higher stake."

"It was a pretty good piece of work, Macy, I own; but how are *we* to make a stake out of it?"

"Why, Turk; you're as dumb as a head of cabbage! Can't you see? Your son Ikey is now the acknowledged son of a millionaire. In a few years Ikey will become of age. Then Ikey will have to dance to *our* tune. Meantime, he'll no doubt see to it that his old dad and yours truly don't want. He'll find ways and means of providing for us, under my careful guidance."

"*Whew!*" the "Turk" whistled. "Macy, you're a chief! Now, who is this nabob millionaire?"

"There!" exclaimed Blanding, "I knew that question would come!"

"Of course; I want to know."

"Sheeny, I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"I know you too well. You'd go prowling around the place, and the first thing you'd know you would give the whole thing away."

"No, sir! There's got to be a middle-man in this game, Sheeny; and I'll play that *role* myself. Whenever I see little Ikey, I'll tell him his dad sends his compliments, and so forth, and desires him to be a good boy and obey his new parents; also Macy Blanding. I'll manage to make a fair living out of it for us both, and, with prospective millions in view, we can afford to be patient for a few years. You're no cause to complain, I'm sure. You can live at your ease. No more stone jugs to fear."

"And never see little Ikey, eh?"

"Why, there's no need of your seeing him. He is living like a prince royal, and that is all you need care about. Moreover, I am the manager of this show, and the programme must be played *my* way."

"Suppose I kick?"

"But you won't kick. You've got better sense than to do that. If you do, then I'll drop you out altogether and go it alone. But I want to do the square white thing by you, Sheeny; and of course you are not fool enough to force me to go back on you."

"That's about so, pard," said the "Turk," thoughtfully. "I guess you're right, and I'm glad Ikey has fallen into such a puddin'."

"There was no 'falling into' about it," said Blanding. "I picked him up and placed him there. You've got *me* to thank for your son's good fortune."

"But, Sheeny, there is another chapter to the story; I have recently found the millionaire's *true* son."

"Thunder!"

"I thought stronger words than that, Sheeny; even though I didn't use them. Now, this other boy is about the same age and size as your Ikey. He is a messenger in the American District Telegraph."

"The deuce you say! How did you ever tumble to him?"

"Well, listen again: I board down in Catherine street, with a certain Mrs. Seeds. She has a son Jimmie, who has been spending six months on the Island. He—"

"Yes, I know him," said the "Turk." "He's got th' makin' of a crook in him, too. All he needed when he came to th' Island was a little schoolin', an' you can bet your life he got it there."

"He's posted, is he?"

"You bet he is."

"So much the better. Well, as I was about to say, he came home a few days ago, and now he's just more than spoiling for revenge on the boy he had the trouble with that sent him up. And, that boy is the millionaire's son."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, sir; it's a fact."

"But, that don't explain how you got onto it."

"I was coming to that," said Blanding. "This boy, who goes by the name of Harold Vernet, was brought up by a Mrs. Barker. She died last winter, and a Mrs. O'Brien, who lived in the same house, froze onto her household goods; although she had to give them up afterward."

"Now, this Mrs. O'Brien is a friend of Mrs. Seeds', and the night Jimmie Seeds came home, she called to see him. I was there. Conversation was naturally about the 'wrongs' Jimmie had endured, and then turned upon young Vernet."

"I won't repeat the conversation at length. Mrs. O'Brien finally allowed that she knew more about the boy than any other person living. Then Mrs. Seeds proceeded to question her, and, to sum it all up and make a long story short, I learned this:

"Among the defunct Mrs. Barker's effects was an old trunk. That trunk Mrs. O'Brien went through, like a dose of salts through a sick mule. In it she found a letter. She went through that also. It was a letter written by Mrs. Barker, and was addressed to young Vernet. In it she explained that he was not her nephew, but an unknown child. She had always led him to believe that she was his aunt. Then she recounted how he had come to her, and so forth, and wound up by describing his baby clothes, which were still in her keeping."

"Well, as the two gossips chattered away, I, knowing what I did, saw that Harold Vernet was, beyond a doubt, the millionaire's lost kid. Proof of it, the letter mentioned that the boy's little dress had been cut in half, one half being gone, as was part of a gold chain that was around his neck."

"Do you catch hold, Sheeny?"

"Yes, I'm comin' along, Macy," the "Turk" replied; "but I can't see why Mrs. Barker made a letter of it all. Why didn't she tell th' boy?"

"The letter explained that. She didn't want to tell him. She wanted him to believe her to be his aunt. She knew he ought to know it, though, so she wrote the letter, which, in case of her being taken off suddenly, would explain all."

"Now, Sheeny, this boy holds—or, at least, I suppose he does, for they were not in the trunk—the other parts of the dress and chain which put your Ikey where he is. I am the only person who holds the key to his life's mystery, but he may at any time stumble upon his parents, and then out your boy Ikey will go."

"What can we do? The game is big, and we can't allow this boy to come in and oust us. Don't you think the dead Mrs. Barker would like to see him singing with the angels up in the cerulean regions?"

"You show him to me," the "Turk" hissed, "an' he'll mighty soon go there!"

"Oh, I was only joking!" Blanding exclaimed. "But how easily it might be done! Jimmie Seeds could shadow him for a day or two, we'll say, and find out what evening he has to work late. Jimmie would tell me, of course, and I could be on hand to send a package down this way."

"Some other boy might bring it, though," the "Turk" objected.

"No fear of it. Jimmie was once a messenger himself, you know, and he knows the ropes. He could easily give me a sign when it came young Vernet's turn to go out. I could then rush into the office with my package, and want it sent, double-quick, to—well, we'll say the Five Points Mission. You could be in waiting, having first had the boy pointed out to you so that you would make no mistake in case anything should miscarry. You would throw an old shawl over him, Jimmie Seeds would rush up and help you, and—but it's all a joke, of course."

"To be sure it is. I understand that. But, as you say, how mighty slick it could be done!"

"And Ikey would then be secure."

"An' th' millions you spoke of still be his—and ours."

"Of course. He's the only child."

"Perhaps, pard," and "Sheeny the Turk" winked his eye impressively as he spoke, "perhaps Jimmie Seeds would like to see me—say to-morrow night, here."

"I'm sure I can't say," said Blanding; "but I'll tell him where he can find you, if you wish."

"All right. Tell him he can find me here any night for a week, about nine o'clock."

More beer and cigars were called for, and

then for half an hour or longer the conversation was continued.

At last the two men arose from the table, stepped to the bar and took a final drink with Mr. O'Glory, and then left the saloon.

"Sheeny the Turk" accompanied Blanding down Baxter street as far as Chatham, where they shook hands and parted; Blanding taking a short route to his boarding-house, in Catherine street and the "Turk" turning back to his lodging-place in Baxter.

"Found a home for Ikey, have you, Mr. Blanding?" the latter muttered as he walked along. "Well, I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure. An' you won't tell me where, eh? I'll have to play detective on you then, I guess, an' find out. Then, when th' boy you spoke about has gone to join th' angels, it may happen that you'll go to keep him company. He! he! he! An' then Sheeny th' Turk an' little Ikey will play it out all by themselves. Ha! ha! ha!"

"When Ikey comes of age, then, perhaps, his fond parents will suddenly die, an' then— But it's all a joke, of course. It's most too good to be true. However, Mr. Macy Blanding, I'll shadow you to-morrow."

And thus the rascal talked and chuckled to himself, till at length he came to the place where he lodged, and entered.

A week went by.

CHAPTER VI.

A CASE FOR DETECTIVE SHARP.

As you saunter up Broadway, "seeing the sights," with time at your disposal, turn from that great thoroughfare into Bleecker street on your right, proceed two blocks down, turn to your right again, and you will find yourself in the upper end of Mulberry street. Here, between Bleecker and Houston streets, stands a large, noticeable building.

No need to ask what building it is, for on its front you will behold the legend:

"CENTRAL DEPARTMENT OF METROPOLITAN POLICE."

The building is four stories in height, with a basement underneath. Along its entire length runs a heavy iron railing. Six broad steps lead up to the main entrance, which, at night, is lighted by two large lamps which stand on posts at the lower step, one on each side.

Situated in the basement of the building is the central office of the police telegraph. Here, by means of dial instruments, telephones, automatic telegraphs, etc., every section of the city is connected with the central department.

In this office, late one afternoon, the following message was received from an up-town precinct station:

"CHIEF INSPECTOR:

"Please send a reliable detective to my house at once. No. — Fifth avenue."

"LANGDON GILES."

The telegram was soon in the Inspector's hands. "Hold on a minute, Steve," that officer said to Detective Sharp, who was about to leave the room after having made a report to his superior on a case he had been detailed to work up, "here is another case for you."

"What is it?" the detective asked.

The Inspector handed him the telegram, saying: "Go up there and see what is wanted. If it is a case of importance, do your best. I'll give you all the help you may require."

"All right, sir. You can't give me a 'pointer', can you?"

"No; I don't know much about the man. He is a millionaire though, I believe, and belongs to the upper ten."

"Well, I'll go up and investigate."

Half an hour later an elderly gentleman ascended the steps of the Giles mansion on Fifth avenue, and rung the bell. He was clad in a broadcloth suit, and wore a silk hat and gold-bound eye-glasses.

The door was opened at once by a man-servant.

"Is Mr. Giles at home?" the elderly gentleman asked.

"Yes, sir," the servant replied, "he is at home."

"Present my card to him then," the gentleman said, and he handed the servant the regularly ordained society pasteboard.

Mr. Langdon Giles was seated in his library, where the card was taken to him, and as he read the name it bore, he said:

"Mr. Henry Walters? who can he be? It must be some one whose acquaintance I have made some time or other, I suppose. Show the gentleman in."

The elderly gentleman was ushered into the room at once, and, after placing a chair for him, the servant withdrew.

"Please to be seated," said Mr. Giles. "I hope you will pardon me, sir, but I fail to recollect you."

"That is not to be wondered at, sir," said the elderly gentleman, as he sat down. "I think we have never met before. This telegram, however, will enlighten you as to who I am and why I am here." And as he spoke he handed a slip of paper across the table.

"Oh!" Mr. Giles exclaimed, as he glanced at the paper, "you're the detective I sent for, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I am Steven Sharp, of the central station."

"But, why do you come here in such a cloud of mystery? Why use an assumed name?"

"You would hardly expect me to come here in police uniform, would you, sir? Not knowing what your case is, I thought it best to let no one know the nature of my business."

"True enough. Not being acquainted with the business, I did not pause to think of that. Do you detectives always work thus, under cover, so to speak?"

"Always. In one disguise to-day; to-morrow in another. We have to work in the dark; otherwise we would never accomplish anything. But, to the point, what do you want of me?"

"Well, sir, to come to business: A bold robbery has been committed in this house, and I desire you, if possible, to recover the stolen property."

"What does the stolen property consist of?" the detective asked.

"Of my wife's diamonds, valued at forty thousand dollars."

"Where! Do you suspect any one?"

"Yes—or, that is, no. No, I do not suspect any one, sir. I suspect no one."

"Ha! you do suspect some one," the detective thought, "and the question is—whom?"

"When were the diamonds stolen?" he asked.

"Between noon of yesterday and three o'clock this afternoon."

"Will you explain all you can in regard to the case?"

"Certainly. My wife took the jewels out of her jewel-casket yesterday, about noon, and brushed them, preparatory to wearing them this evening. At three o'clock to-day, not more than an hour ago, she opened the jewel-casket again, and the diamonds were missing."

"Was the casket kept locked, sir?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had it been forced open?"

"No, sir."

"Was it found locked, same as your wife left it?"

"Yes."

"Can you show me the casket, and the room where it was kept?"

"Excuse me for a moment," said Mr. Giles, "and I will see." And he left the room.

"This promises to be a mysterious affair," the detective mused, when left alone. "Mr. Giles suspects some one; of that I feel certain. If he suspected a servant, he would speak out; but it is some one else. He does not want to utter his suspicions, and therefore I must conclude that he distrusts some member of his own family. This is a slight foundation to build on, anyhow. Perhaps his wife has disposed of the jewels to liquidate some private debt, and, to shut her husband's eye, proclaims them stolen. Perhaps a son or a daughter, if he has either, has taken them. I must look for something that will throw a little light upon the mystery."

Presently Mr. Giles returned to the room, and said:

"You may accompany me, sir."

"One word first," said the detective, in a low tone.

"Have you made your loss known to any one?"

"No; only my wife and I know of it."

"Good. Now, your servants will wonder who I am, should any of them see me accompanying you about the house. I will make some remarks as we pass through the hall about refurbishing certain rooms, as though you contemplate having it done. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see. Say whatever you please."

Mr. Giles then led the way from the room into the hall, and up the broad staircase.

"Are the halls and stairs to be refurbished, too?" the detective asked.

"The parlors are to be considered first, I suppose? I have an excellent variety of parlor furniture now; something entirely new."

"I suppose so; but I will show you what is wanted up-stairs first."

On reaching the first landing, Mr. Giles opened a door and led the detective into a sumptuously-furnished sitting-room, where, seated in a luxurious rocking-chair, was a woman of surpassing beauty of face and form. And as his eyes fell upon her the thought entered the detective's mind, "Where have I seen that face before?"

"Mrs. Giles, this man is the detective," said Mr. Giles, by way of introduction.

The detective bowed, and the lady inclined her head.

"This room," said Mr. Giles, "is Mrs. Giles's private sitting-room. The room adjoining is her bedroom, and beyond that is her dressing-room. I will show you that room, for there is where the jewels were kept." And he conducted the detective through the bedroom and into the dressing-room, Mrs. Giles following.

"This is the jewel-box," said Mr. Giles then, laying his hand upon a handsome ebony box, beautifully inlaid with turquois, pearl and gold, which stood upon the top of a bureau.

The detective examined it.

"May I ask you a few questions, madam?" he asked, addressing Mrs. Giles.

"As many as you will, sir," was the gracious reply.

"Mr. Giles informs me that you took your jewels from their casket yesterday, about noon, and brushed them. Was there any one in the room with you at the time—your waiting-maid, for instance?"

"No, sir; no one except my little son."

As he put the question, the detective was, to all appearances, gazing straight at the jewel-box; yet he was, in fact, watching both Mr. and Mrs. Giles with eagle eyes.

"Ah!" he thought, "it is your boy you suspect, is it, Mr. Giles? Well, let's see how it looks in that direction. Aloud he said:

"When you had replaced the jewels in the box, madam, did you lock it? Are you certain on this point?"

"Yes, sir; I locked it."

"Where did you put the key?"

"I hung it upon a small nail behind that picture," pointing to an oil-painting on the wall.

"And you found it still there when you came to open the box to-day?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then," said the detective, "either that key was used by the thief, or the lock was skillfully picked. Will you allow me to see the key?"

The key was handed him.

"The lock must be a very intricate one," he said. "It is safe to say it was not picked."

"Now, are there any evidences that this room has been forcibly entered?"

"None that we could discover, sir," said Mr. Giles.

"Is the door locked at night?"

"The door leading into the hall is locked when I retire," replied Mrs. Giles.

"Is that the only door leading from this suit of rooms?"

"No," said Mr. Giles; "my rooms the same as these, are adjoining. A door leads from one sitting-room to the other, and my room opens into the hall. But last night we both retired about eleven o'clock, and both those outer doors were then locked."

"And at what time were they first opened this morning?"

"About nine o'clock."

"Then, supposing no one entered between those hours, the robbery was either committed between noon of yesterday and ten o'clock in the evening, or between nine this morning and three o'clock."

"Will you please show me the nail where the key was hung, Mrs. Giles?"

The lady pointed to the nail, which was quite high up from the floor. She could barely reach it.

"Now, please to give me a list of your servants."

This was done.

"Are any of them new ones?" the detective then asked.

"No," said Mr. Giles; "they all have been with us for years. There is not a new face in the house, sir, except— But they are perfectly trustworthy, sir, every one of them."

"You were about to make an exception," the detective remarked.

"No, I was thinking of something else," said Mr. Giles, evasively.

"No matter. How many persons have you in your family, sir?"

"Only three; myself, Mrs. Giles, and our boy."

"Ah! yes; I think you mentioned your son, Mr. Giles. How old is he?"

"Fifteen."

"Oh! then he is but a boy!"

"Nothing more."

The detective watched Mr. Giles closely as he mentioned his son, and saw that he looked relieved at his exclamation that he was but a boy.

"Did I throw you off the track?" he thought. "I guess I did. You look a little relieved. You don't want me to distrust your son. Well, I know whom you suspect, Mr. Giles, and I am inclined to suspect the same party."

The detective's eyes had not been idle, but had been taking in every detail of the room, and suddenly he stepped forward to a chair and looked carefully at the seat.

It was an upholstered chair, covered with heavy plush of a dark red color, and from where the detective had stood he had seen two peculiar shade-marks on the chair seat.

He now tipped the chair so that the light struck the plush at an angle which would give the best effect to the shading, and beheld two well-defined footprints.

Instantly he drew a rule from his pocket and measured the length of the shade-spots, after which he passed his hand quickly over the soft, yielding plush and effaced the tracks.

"What have you discovered there?" asked Mr. Giles.

"Only a mark which I thought was a footprint," the detective replied, "but I may have been mistaken."

Mr. Giles's face clouded.

At that moment a knock was heard at the door of the sitting-room, and the next moment a boy entered and came hurriedly into the toilet-room.

"Mother," he said, "may I go out for a little while, just for a walk?"

"Yes," was the answer, "but do not go far."

"All right," said the boy, and he went out.

The detective had eyed him sharply, taking particular notice of the size of his feet, and when he was gone, said:

"Your son, madam?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective's opinion was now formed. Whether he was right or wrong in the conclusions he had drawn, remained to be seen.

"Will you please to give me a careful description of the missing jewels, madam?" next asked the detective, addressing Mrs. Giles.

The lady described them, the detective taking down her words in short-hand, and when she had done he closed his note book, saying:

"I will now go. I think I can now trace the jewels."

"But," said Mr. Giles, "you have not examined the windows and doors."

"On the contrary," said the detective, in reply, "I have noticed everything. I will report to you, sir, as soon as I can. In the mean time, do not mention your loss. If you do you may throw obstacles in my way."

The detective appeared to be in haste to depart, and Mr. Giles conducted him to the door.

"Well, Mr. Giles," he said, as he left the mansion, "in regard to the carpets, and so forth, I will await your further orders."

Once out of the house he glanced up and down the avenue, but the boy for whom he looked was not to be seen.

"Missed you, have I, my lad? Well, I'll put a spotter on you to-morrow." And with this muttered remark, Detective Sharp turned into Forty-second street and started across to the Elevated Railroad station.

CHAPTER VII.

OUR HERO IN GREAT DANGER.

HAL VERNET, Dick Smith, Dan Emmery, and several other boys were seated in the messengers' room of the American District station where they were employed.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening.

"Say, boys," Dan Emmery was saying, "you can't guess who I seen to-day."

"No; who did you see?" Dick Smith asked, quite as regardless of the rules of grammar as Dan.

"Why, I seen Seedy Jim. He was a-talkin' to a fellow down in the Bowery."

"So, he's out of the jug, is he?"

"Yes; and he is looking pretty tough, I can tell you."

"Hear that, Hal?" queried Dick; "you'll have to look out for him, now. He may lay for you some time when you're out, and give you another crack on the head."

"I'm not afraid of him," asserted Hal. "If he'll give me half a chance I can whip him, and I know it."

"But, he won't give you half a chance," Dan declared. "If he wants revenge, he'll try to get it the same way he did before."

"Then I must be on the lookout for him."

Little did the boy imagine, though, the urgent necessity there was for him to be on guard against his enemy that very night.

"I wonder what he's going to do?" Dick Smith queried. "He can't get back here."

"Give it up," said Dan. "I guess he'll find it hard to get a job at anything, now. Jail-birds are not wanted."

"That's something that is not right!" cried Hal Vernet. "After a boy or a man has once been sent to jail, he might as well be dead. When he comes out, no one will have anything to do with him; and if he desired ever so much to reform, he couldn't. There's no chance for him to live, unless he becomes a robber and cut-throat. If I were the boss here I'd put Seedy Jim to work again, and give him a chance. I believe if some one would help him now, he'd turn out to be an honest man."

"Not much he wouldn't!" cried Dan. "It ain't in him. He's a bad egg."

"He can't without help, anyhow," said Hal. "I think we'd ought to speak to the manager, and see if he won't take him back."

"What! and let him bully us around again? Not much!"

"Maybe he wouldn't try it any more."

"Oh! yes he would. He'd be worse than ever. Besides who wants to work with a jail-bird?"

"That's just where it is!" cried Hal. "You wouldn't help him if you could."

And thus the boys talked, never dreaming that "Seedy Jim" was scarcely a dozen steps away from them. Yet such was the fact.

The young ruffian was standing close by the side of the building, in a deep shadow, watching the messenger boys as they passed out and in. He had been standing there for more than an hour.

Presently he drew half a dozen or so of matches from his pocket and lighted them all at once, allowed them to blaze for a moment, and then threw them into the street.

And then it was that a man crossed over from the opposite side of the street, and entered the building.

"Good-evening," he said, to the manager. "Here is a small parcel I want you to send to the Five Points Mission, on Park street, as soon as you can."

The package was received, the charges paid, and the man then waited until Harold Vernet was called to carry the package to its destination.

"This is your last urn, ain't it?" asked Dick Smith, as Hal was about to set out.

"Yes," was the answer. "If you are not here when I come back, Dick, I'll wait for you."

"All right."

And then the boy started off, and the man went away.

He walked at a rapid pace, paying but little attention to his surroundings. He knew almost every inch of the city, below Fourteenth street, and had no need to look for street names on the lamp-posts, to guide his steps.

He soon neared his destination, and was about to cross the street, when suddenly a man sprung out from the dark shadow of a doorway and flung a coarse blanket over his head, completely enveloping him in its folds, and thus rendering him powerless to defend himself, or to raise an alarm.

That man was "Sheeny, the Turk."

He was soon joined by a youth who came hurrying to the scene, who proved to be "Seedy Jim;" and together the two rascals raised Hal up and bore him into a dark alley.

So quickly was it done that no one had noticed them.

Through the alley they carried their prisoner, down half a dozen rickety steps, and along a foul-smelling passage, then up another flight of steps and into a house.

Here they paused.

"D'ye think any one seen us?" the "Turk" asked.

"No, I guess not," answered "Seedy Jim." "We done the job up pretty quick."

"Well, up with him then, an' we'll tote him up to th' rooms."

Hal was lifted up again, and carried up a creaking staircase, then along a hallway for a little distance into a room, and here dropped onto the floor in no gentle manner.

"There you are, my lad-a-buck," the "Turk" exclaimed, and as he spoke he pulled the blanket off.

Hal was on his feet in an instant. The room was lighted by a candle that was stuck into the neck of a bottle, and seeing "Seedy Jim" before him, the boy rushed upon him. But the "Turk" interfered. One blow of his fist knocked the poor boy into a corner, almost senseless.

"None of that, my lad," he cried. "We ain't got no time for fightin'."

"Oh! let him come at me once!" cried "Seedy Jim." "I'm itching to belt him in th' mug."

"Never mind that now," said the "Turk." "You take that string and tie his hands behind him. I'll hold him while ye do it." And pointing to a piece of strong string that hung on a nail, he then advanced to Hal and caught him by his arms.

"Seedy Jim" quickly tied the boy's hands securely behind him, and then the "Turk" thrust a gag into his mouth, so that he could not cry out for help.

"There you are, my blushing primrose," he said, when this was done. "You may kick and stomp around all you want to, but that won't do you a bit of good. I'd tie your feet, too; but haven't any more string. I guess you're fast enough, though."

"Now, Jeems, my boy," he added, turning to his young proselyte; "you go down to Mike O'Glory's bungalow an' see if Soft Patter is there. If he ain't there, you wait till he comes, an' then bring him up here. Bring along a bottle of whisky, too. An' then, when it gets a little later, me an' Soft Patter will show you how to crack a crib in th' best modern style."

"What about th' kid?" "Seedy Jim" asked, indicating Hal.

"Oh! he'll keep. He can't git away. We'll fix him after we're done with th' other job. About two o'clock in the mornin' there won't be any one around to pipe us off, an' then we'll wring his neck an' drop him into th' sewer."

"D'ye hear that, you little pet?" cried "Seedy Jim," at the same time giving Hal a brutal kick.

"We're going to set your little spirit free. Ha, ha, ha! Eh, Turk?"

"You jest bet we are," the "Turk" answered.

"But, Jim, be off. Maybe Soft Patter will be there and gone, if you don't hurry. He won't wait."

"All right," said "Seedy Jim," "I'm off," and he left the room.

The moment he was gone, "Sheeny the Turk" took up the candle and went into an adjoining room, closing and locking the door behind him.

Hal could still see the light as it streamed under the door and through a long crack in one of the panels, and getting up from the floor he stepped lightly across the room and applied his eye to the last-named aperture to see what the "Turk" was doing.

He beheld him upon his knees before a fire-place, busily engaged in taking up three or four of the bricks that formed the hearth.

"What in the world can he be doing that for?" Hal thought. But he was soon to know.

Having removed four or five of the bricks from their place, the "Turk" took a small package from his pocket and deposited it in the hole thus disclosed. Then the bricks were carefully replaced, ashes were sprinkled over them and the task was accomplished.

And none too soon, either, if the "Turk" desired to keep his secret from his accomplices, as was evidently the case, for he had hardly finished his work when he heard them ascending the stairs. He hurriedly placed the candle upon the mantle-shelf, and then opening a door that led into the hall, said:

"That you, Patter?"

"Yes, it's me, Patter," was the reply. "What d'ye want of me?"

"Come in, you an' Jim, an' I'll explain. There's a big pile of boodle waitin' fer us to come an' lift it, an' no danger, either."

"Oh! in that case I'm with ye, every time," said the man called "Soft Patter," as he entered the room, followed by "Seedy Jim," who carried the bottle of whisky the "Turk" had told him to bring.

"Soft Patter," so called on account of his ability to walk without making a sound, when occasion required, was another thief whose acquaintance "Seedy Jim" had formed while in jail.

"Sheeny the Turk" brought forth three glasses and filled them with liquor from the bottle, and then the three rascals seated themselves at a rickety table.

"Where is this crib you're a-goin' to crack?" "Soft Patter" asked.

"Hush! not so loud!" the "Turk" cautioned. "There's ears in the next room."

"Oh! I didn't know that," said "Soft Patter."

"Well, let's drink a bumper to our luck," said the "Turk," "an' then we'll talk business afterward."

"All right," was the response, and all three emptied their glasses.

"By hokey! but that's good!" cried the "Turk," with a sly wink at "Soft Patter." "Let's try another, partners," and he refilled the glasses. But this time "Seedy Jim" hesitated.

"I'm afraid I can't stand it," he said. "I ain't as used to it as you old stagers is."

"Oh! nonsense!" exclaimed "Soft Patter," he in turn now winking at the "Turk." "Put it down ye, boy; it is as mild as new milk, an' wouldn't hurt a baby."

"But, I—I feel th' stuff in my head a'ready," "Seedy Jim" protested.

"Oh! that's nothin', be it, Patter?" cried the "Turk." "That'll soon pass off. One more glass will jest fix you right. Come, no hangin' back, now; but down with it!" And once more the glasses were emptied.

The effect upon "Seedy Jim" was almost instantaneous. The room began to turn round and round him; he stared in a stupid manner at his companions for a few minutes, then he rose up from his chair and tried to walk, but his legs refused to support him and he fell to the floor in a heap.

"Ha, ha, ha! what's the matter, boy?" the "Turk" asked, as he roared with laughter.

"Oh! he's only a-playin' off he's dead drunk!" cried "Soft Patter."

Two or three times the young ruffian essayed to rise, but failed most miserably, and at last he succumbed to the influence of the potent liquor and fell into a drunken sleep.

"There, that settles him," said the "Turk." "We don't want no kids along on this racket."

"Well, Sheeny, what is yer racket?" "Soft Patter" asked.

"Jest wait a minute, partner," said the "Turk," "till I see how my young friend in th' next room is, an' then I'll explain th' hull thing." And he rose up and unlocked the door of Hal's extemporaneous prison.

Hal had quickly left his post at the door and thrown himself upon the floor in the corner where the "Turk" had last seen him.

"Oh! there ye be, eh?" the "Turk" said, as he opened the door. "Can't get up, with yer hands tied behind ye, eh? Well, so much th' better then." And he withdrew, locking the door as before.

No sooner was the door closed, however, than Hal had his eye at the crack in the panel again.

"Who've ye got in there, anyhow?" "Soft Patter" asked.

"Only my boy, Ikey," the "Turk" replied. "He tried to talk back to me a little while ago, an' I jest tied him up fer a while to tame him down a bit. Take a little more of th' likker?"

"No, I guess not. I'm loaded enough now, if ye want me to do biz at all straight."

"Sheeny the Turk" evidently considered that he himself had had about as much as he could well carry, too; so the bottle was put away.

"Now, Patter," he said, "the crib I want you to help me clean out is a Fifth avenue mansion."

"Th' deuce!"

"Yes, sir; fact."

"Whose place is it?"

"I believe th' man's name is Langdon Giles. He's a reg'lar millionaire."

The men spoke in low tones, but Hal was able, by listening sharply, to catch every word they said.

"How did you ever come to light onto that crib?" "Soft Patter" asked.

"Now, that's my affair," the "Turk" answered. "If I'm willin' to take you in for half th' boodle, that's all you need care about!"

"Yes, I s'pose so. Well, how are a-goin' to get in?"

"Walk right in th' front door."

"What?"

"Yes, sir; fact."

"Well, that is a puddin'. You must have a partner in th' house, ain't ye?"

"Now, Patter, you want to know too much. You jest take care that you git your share of th' plunder, an' ask no questions."

"All right, Sheeny; all right. I ain't a-grumblin'. How far up the avenue is it though?"

"It's up near Forty-second street; No. —"

"An' when will ye start?"

"Oh! no use goin' fer an hour or two yet. Come! let's try a little game of cards, to pass away th' time." And as he spoke, "Sheeny the Turk" brought to light a well-worn pack of cards, and he and "Soft Patter" began playing.

CHAPTER VIII.

BURGULARS BAFLED.

WHEN the two villains in the adjoining room began to play at cards, Hal Vernet soon found that he was not likely to gain any further information by listening, so he drew quietly away from the crack in the panel of the door and leaned against the wall to think.

How could he free his hands? How could he escape?

If he could possibly get away from these two rascals, it was clearly his duty to warn Mr. Giles of the intended robbing of his house; and with that thought uppermost in his mind the boy tried to think of some means of escape.

He tugged hard and long at the cords that bound his hands together, but could not slacken them in the least degree, and only succeeded in making his wrists very sore.

He began to despair.

Presently, however, his hopes brightened, as a new thought suddenly entered his mind. In his pocket was a knife. If he could only get it out and open it, he might, perhaps, be able to cut his bonds.

No sooner had the thought suggested itself, than Hal began to contort himself into almost every position that can be imagined, to get his hand into his pocket. But it seemed, at first, impossible to do it. At last, however, he succeeded in getting the fingers of his left hand into the right-hand pocket of his trousers, his hands being crossed, and after a hard

struggle he managed to get hold of his knife and to bring it out.

Then, to open it. For full twenty minutes he tried and tried to accomplish this, but all in vain. The knife opened hard, even under the most favorable circumstances; and to open it now seemed to be quite out of the question.

Again the boy's spirits sunk.

But, "Necessity is the mother of invention," and at last, after almost an hour spent in vain endeavors, an idea occurred to the boy—an idea so simple in itself that he felt heartily ashamed to think it had not come to his mind before. Was it practicable though? That he would soon put to the test.

He dropped upon his knees, reached down and felt for a sharp nail in the heels of his shoes, and soon found one. Then he applied the blade of the knife to it, caught the nail in the thumb slot, gave a steady pull, and the knife was open.

Hal's heart bounded with joy. Now, he had simply to cut the string to be free. And this he did. After two or three trials he managed to get the blade of the knife under one of the turns of the cord, and it was soon severed. Then another and another followed, and in a short time the boy's hands were freed.

At that moment he heard a noise in the other room, and dropped down upon the floor instantly, holding his hands behind him.

The next moment the key was turned in the lock, and "Sheeny the Turk" entered.

"There ye be yet, eh?" he said. "Well, I guess you're all right an' safe. Sorry to say I must leave ye fer an hour or two, but can't help it. Let me see if everything is fast." And he made a tour of inspection of the doors and windows.

Everything was securely fastened.

"Well, so-long, my lad," the "Turk" said, as he left the room. "I'll attend to your case when I come back. And, perhaps to that other feller's, too," he added, jerking his thumb toward the next room, no doubt meaning "Seedy Jim." And then he shut the door, locking it again.

Hal was on his feet at once, and instantly tore the gag away from his mouth.

He peered through the crack in the panel of the door, and saw that his two enemies had extinguished the light and left the room.

"Now," the boy thought, "what am I to do? How get out of here?"

He had a few matches in his pocket, and lighting one, he looked around his prison.

On the mantle-shelf he discovered a small piece of candle. This he lighted, and then by its light began to explore the room.

First of all he tried the doors, but these were securely fastened. Then he examined the windows, of which there were two, but they were both tightly nailed down, and the shutters were secured by padlocks. It looked as though escape was not to be thought of.

He went again to the doors. The one leading into the adjoining room was locked upon the opposite side, and the key was in the lock. Hal had a key in his pocket, but owing to the other key being in the way, he could not try it here, so he turned to the other door. Here he tried his key, but it was much too small for the lock.

What could he do? He sat down in despair.

Presently Hal thought of his knife. Could he not cut a hole through the cracked panel of the door large enough for him to reach through and turn the key? To think was to act.

His knife was strong and sharp, and in a remarkably short time he had cut a hole large enough to admit his arm. Then he reached through, turned the key, and was at liberty.

He did not pause even to bestow a glance upon "Seedy Jim," who was still lying upon the floor in his drunken sleep, but opened the door and went out into the hall, carrying his candle with him.

He descended the stairs, soon found his way to the front door of the hall, and a moment later was out upon the street. Then pausing only long enough to recognize the locality he was in, and to find that he had come out into Baxter street, he sped away as fast as he could toward the nearest station of the Elevated Railroad.

He thought of the parcel for the Five Points Mission House, which he still had in his pocket, but considering that "Seedy Jim" had had a hand in his capture, he believed it to have been a "plant" to bring him into the neighborhood. And, even if not, he thought his first duty was to prevent, if possible, the contemplated burglary.

He reached the railroad station just in time to catch a train.

When our hero arrived, in due time, at Forty-second street and Fifth avenue, he stopped and looked around him to find the number "Sheeny the Turk" had mentioned. He glanced at the nearest house, to find whether he was above or below the right place, and having ascertained this, he was off like a shot.

The street was silent, and the boy's running footsteps rung out loud and clear. Had the robbers had a guard posted to warn them of danger, they certainly could have made their escape ere the boy could have roused the household. But such they had not.

Reaching the house, Hal stopped. Not a light was to be seen nor a sound to be heard. He believed he was the first to arrive. When he ascended the steps, however, and found the front door slightly open, he thought otherwise.

He was trembling with excitement. What if he should be taken for a robber, and shot?

He pushed the door carefully open far enough to

admit his body and slipped into the hall. On the right-hand side was the library, the door standing ajar, and here Hal saw a light. He tip-toed to the door and looked in, and, upon their knees before a small safe, saw "Sheeny the Turk" and "Soft Patter."

The boy's heart was now beating so wildly that he almost feared it could be heard. What should he do? How give the alarm?

At first he thought of going out and finding a policeman, but he saw this would give the robbers time to complete their work and to escape. He had stepped quietly back to the hall door under the first impulse of this thought, and now, for the first time feeling the key in the massive lock, he carefully closed the door and locked it, taking the key out.

At that moment the burglars in the library made a slight noise in their work, which so startled the boy that he cried out at the top of his voice:

"Help! help! Thieves! Murder! Help! help!"

At the first cry of alarm the two burglars sprung up, dropping their tools and lantern in their haste, and made a rush for the hall door. But, what was their surprise and rage to find it closed and locked.

"Help! help!" Hal continued to cry, ascending part way up the staircase to be out of reach of the villains, who were now thundering at the door, "help! help!"

Instantly doors were heard slamming in every part of the house, and Mr. Giles soon appeared at the head of the stairs, with a lamp in one hand and a revolver in the other, the butler at the same time appearing at the end of the hall, similarly armed.

"Thieves in your house, sir!" cried Hal, pointing to the two cowering villains. "Don't let them escape, sir!"

Neither Mr. Giles nor the butler had paused longer than a second, but advanced upon the thieves at once and commanded them to surrender; which, as they beheld the gleaming pistols, the rascals immediately did.

"Call a policeman," Mr. Giles then said to the butler.

The butler stepped to an automatic telegraph dial that hung on the wall, and turned the indicator around to the word "police." Nothing further was necessary. In a few minutes a policeman would be on the spot.

"Now," said Mr. Giles to the two burglars, "you gentlemen will please seat yourselves upon the floor. And, if you make the slightest attempt to escape, you will be shot down like dogs."

They sat down.

Then Mr. Giles turned to Hal.

"How came you here, my lad? at this hour of the night?" he asked, "and how did you get into the house?"

"I overheard those men planning to rob you, sir," Hal answered, "and I came here to warn you. I found the door open, and came right in; and, the key being in the lock, I locked the door after me. Here is the key, sir. Then I raised the alarm, and, here we are."

"But where were you, and where were they? that you could overhear their plans to rob me?" Mr. Giles asked.

"I was sent with a parcel to a place down at the Five Points, sir; and when I came near the place, that man," pointing at "Sheeny the Turk," "sprung upon me and threw a blanket over my head. Then he and another fellow carried me into a house, where they intended to kill me when they came back from here. I heard it planned to rob you, sir, and as soon as I could get out of the house I came right here to warn you."

"Oh! the poor boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Giles. "Why should they want to kill you?"

"I do not know, ma'am," Hal replied, glancing up at the beautiful lady, who had just appeared upon the scene, "I never did them any harm."

"I believe you," the lady said. "Mr. Giles, you must reward this boy."

"Certainly," said Mr. Giles. "What is your name, my lad?"

"Harold Vernet, sir."

"And where do you live?"

Hal gave his address.

"Very well, my boy. You shall be well rewarded for this night's work. But, will you not stay here till morning?"

"Oh! no, sir. I thank you, sir; but Mrs. Smith would be anxious about me."

"And who is Mrs. Smith?"

"She is the lady I live with, sir."

"Have you no parents then?"

"No, sir."

"Oh! the poor boy!" Mrs. Giles again exclaimed.

"How long have your parents been dead?"

"I—I do not know, ma'am. I never knew my parents."

"Oh! poor boy, poor boy! I—"

But, much to Hal's relief, there came a loud knock at the door at that moment.

Mr. Giles handed the key to a servant, who unlocked and opened the door, and a policeman stepped in.

"What's wanted?" he asked.

"Two prisoners for you," said Mr. Giles. "These two men are burglars, and were captured in the act of robbing my house."

"Oh! ho!" said the officer, "that's it, is it? Well, my fine fellows, get up here and let me try these bracelets on you." And he displayed a pair of handcuffs.

The men arose, and were locked together.

"What's your name and number, sir?" the officer then asked of Mr. Giles. And, being informed, he departed with his two prisoners.

A few minutes later Hal was allowed to depart, and, with all possible speed, he hastened home.

CHAPTER IX.

LOOKING FOR HAL.

A SHORT time after Hal Vernet had left the telegraph station to go to the Five Points, Dick Smith was dispatched on an errand to an up-town hotel, and it was more than an hour before he returned.

"Where's Hal Vernet?" he asked of the manager. "He has not returned yet," said the manager, "and I am getting a little anxious about him." "Not returned?" Dick exclaimed, "then there is something wrong! He promised to wait here for me if I was out when he came back. Where did he go to, anyhow?"

"To the Five Points Mission, with a parcel." "Then I'll skip right down there and see whether he got there all right or not," said Dick. And away he started.

When he arrived at the place he rung the bell, and the janitor of the building came to the door.

"Did one of us American District boys come here about an hour ago with a package?" Dick asked.

"No," was the answer, "no boy has been here to-night."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am," said the man. "Why! anybody lost, strayed, or stolen?"

"Yes," said Dick, "somebody's lost, strayed, or stolen, sure. One of our boys started for this place over an hour ago, and he hasn't been seen since. I came to see if he's been here."

"Well, he didn't get here," said the man, "for I've been right here all the evening."

Dick was now thoroughly alarmed. He ran home as fast as his legs could carry him, and burst into the house like a young cyclone.

"Mother, where's Hal?" he gasped.

"Where is Hal?" the widow repeated, "what do you mean? He has not come home yet."

"Not been here?" cried Dick. "Then something's wrong, sure. He left the station more than an hour ago, to go to the Five Points on an errand, and no one has seen him since. I believe Seedy Jim has killed him."

"Oh! goodness bless us!" cried the widow, springing to her feet, "you don't say that? Quick, Harry; on with your boots and go and notify the police. Oh! my poor boy, my poor boy!"

As for little Joe, he began to cry outright.

Harry Smith needed no second call, but was ready for the street in a moment.

"What place was Hal sent to?" he asked of Dick.

"The Five Points Mission," Dick replied.

"Did you go there?"

"Yes, and Hal has not been there."

"Where are you going now?"

"I'm going to find Mr. Sharp, that detective friend of Hal's. He can find him if any one can."

"All right," said Harry. "You go for him, and I'll notify the police at the nearest station."

"And, whatever you do," Mrs. Smith called out as they left the house, "don't come back without the boy."

Reaching the street, Harry hurried away in one direction and Dick in another, the latter heading straight for the police head-quarters on Mulberry street.

When he arrived there he rushed into the building and demanded to see the "boss."

The sergeant in charge asked what he wanted.

"Well," Dick answered, "I want to find Detective Sharp, just as quick as I can. Is he around here?"

"No, he is not here. What do you want to find him for?"

"Where does he live?"

"What do you want to find him for?"

"Oh," Dick exclaimed, "you police fellows don't know anything but to ask questions! I want to find him because a friend of his is missing, and we think he's been murdered. Now, tell me quick where he lives."

"Well, my lad, he lives at No. — West — street; but—"

"Never mind the 'but' part of it," cried Dick, and he was away on the instant. He did not pause to think that perhaps the sergeant was about to inform him that the detective was not at home. He did not pause to think of anything, in fact.

When he reached the detective's house, he sprang up the steps three at a time, and gave a furious tug at the bell.

The detective happened to be at home, and came to the door in person.

"What's all this racket about?" he demanded, seeing his caller was a boy. "Do you want to pull the bell out? But—hello! it's you, eh, Dick? What brings you here?"

"I've come after you," said Dick. "Hal Vernet is lost, and I'm afraid Seedy Jim has laid him out again."

"Is that so?" the detective asked, quite solicitously. "Come in, lad, and tell me all about it."

Dick entered the house, and then the detective questioned him.

"When did you see Hal last?" he asked.

"About nine o'clock. He then started to take a parcel down to the Mission at the Five Points, and has not been seen since."

"Did you go to see whether he had been there?"

"Yes, sir; and they had not seen him."

"That is strange. Why do you think Seedy Jim had a hand in his disappearance?"

"Because Jim is out of jail, and has been seen prowling around."

"Did you see the party who left the parcel which Hal was sent out to deliver?"

"Yes, I saw him, but I don't know who he is."

"Would you know him again?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you describe him?"

"Not very well, I guess; but he was pretty good-looking, and had black hair and eyes."

"Have you notified the police?"

"My brother Harry went to do that when I started for here."

The detective glanced at his watch.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, "I wish I could go at once, but I can't. I have an appointment to keep. I will change my attire, however, and then if the party is not here in half an hour I won't wait longer. Will you wait for me?"

"Yes, sir," Dick answered.

"All right. Sit down, and I will soon be back."

And the detective left the room.

Dick sat down, and looked around at the objects in the room while he awaited the detective's return.

Presently a man entered the room, at whom Dick stared in surprise. Surprised to find such a person there, and more so that he should enter the house without ringing. The man was, to all appearances, a truckman. He was clad in the overalls and checked jumper peculiar to that craft.

He returned Dick's stare for a few moments, and then laughed.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

Dick recognized the voice of Detective Sharp.

"Sho!" he ejaculated, "I wouldn't have known you, never."

The half-hour was almost gone when there came a ring at the bell, and the detective went to the door and admitted a young man.

"Well," the detective asked, "what luck?"

"No luck," was the answer. "I have been to every pawn-shop of any importance in the city, but can't find a trace of the diamonds."

"Of course you told the dealers to watch for them?"

"Yes, sir. And, I stretched the story a little, too. I told them it would not do for them to try any funny work, for every pawn-shop in the city would be kept under surveillance, night and day."

"A good idea. We can't trust some of those fellows. If they can get hold of forty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds for four or five thousand dollars, they are not going to run and tell the police about it, and thus lose a fortune. Not much!"

"Well, about the other case?"

"Nothing new."

"Anything further to report?"

"Nothing."

"Well, Squirrel will see you at the Central at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. I must bid you good-night now, as I have business on hand."

"Come, my lad," to Dick, "and we'll be off."

And the three left the house, Detective Sharp and Dick taking the quickest rail route for down-town, while the other detective, the "Squirrel," who was one of Sharp's assistants, went to his home.

"Now," said the detective, when they had arrived at the station where they left the train, "we'll go first to your home. Hal may have turned up by this time."

"That's so," said Dick, and to his home they went. But Hal was not there.

Then they went to the telegraph station, but that was closed for the night.

"Now," said the detective, "suppose you were sent on the same errand Hal was sent on, what route would you take?"

"The shortest one, of course," Dick answered.

"Well, then, go ahead and lead me to the Five Points by that route."

"All right," assented Dick, and they set out.

When they arrived at "Paradise Square" Dick stopped.

"Well?" the detective interrogated.

"I was thinking," said Dick, "whether he would cross here or follow the sidewalk around."

"Which would you do?"

"Oh! I'd just skip right across!"

"Well, then we'll suppose that's what Hal did. Lead on."

They started across, when suddenly the detective stopped and picked something up. It was a lead-pencil, with a steel cap on the end. He had been watching the ground all the way, and now was at last rewarded by finding something.

"Did you ever see Hal have this pencil?" he asked of Dick.

"Yes!" said Dick, excitedly, "it is his. I'm sure of it, for I gave it to him."

They walked on to the corner of the street and turned into Baxter street. Here they paused.

"This clew seems to show that Hal has met with foul play," the detective mused. "He must be the victim of some foul intrigue."

"I guess I don't just get onto that word *intreeg*," said Dick, "but I'll bet poor Hal is in trouble! And—"

But, and he grasped the detective's arm as he whispered, "there goes the very man who left the parcel at the station, and he's leading Seedy Jim!"

The detective looked and recognized Macy Blanding.

CHAPTER X.

DICK SMITH TAKES LESSONS.

ABOUT the time that Dick Smith called at Detective Sharp's house, Macy Blanding was seated in Mike O'Glory's saloon. In fact, he had been there for more than an hour. He seemed to be waiting for some one. As the time passed by, however, and the one for whom he waited did not come, he grew impatient.

"Hang it all!" he presently exclaimed, "where can the man be? He promised to have been here an hour or more ago. Mike, another glass of beer."

The beer was provided, and O'Glory said:

"You seem to be in a bad temper, Mr. Blanding. What's th' matter?"

"I am in a bad temper," said Macy. "Sheeny the

Turk promised to meet me here, and here I've been waiting for him an hour or more."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Mike. "Why didn't you say somethin' about it before? Sheeny the Turk sent a young feller here two hours ago to find Soft Patter—you know him? and I think maybe Sheeny and Patter have got a job on hand."

"The fool!" cried Macy. "The first he knows he'll be shut up again! I wish he *would* do something though that would send him up for *life*. Confound him! a nice one he is to attend to business. Well, I s'pose I'll have to drop into his place and see if I can find him." And draining his glass and bidding Mike good-night, Macy left the saloon.

He went at once to "Sheeny the Turk's" lodgings. Entering the hall, he lighted a match and ascended the stairs, and then tried the door of one of the Turk's rooms. It was locked.

"Ha!" he thought "the rascal is out, and the place is locked up."

On stepping to the next door and trying that, however, he found it open. His match had now burned out, but he struck another, and seeing the candle in the bottle on the table, lighted it. Then he looked around him.

The first object to meet his view was "Seedy Jim," lying at full length on the floor, and instantly he suspected foul play; but on a closer examination he found that the young rascal was only drunk.

"This is curious business," Macy muttered. "Where can the kid be?" And taking up the candle he entered the other room, the door of which stood open.

But he found no one there, and returned to "Seedy Jim." Placing the candle upon the table, he gave the young rascal a thorough shaking, to rouse him from his stupor.

"Wasser masser?" the drunken youth finally managed to say.

"What's the matter with you?" Macy demanded, giving him another severe shaking.

"Nossin' masser me!" said Jim. "Can't ye leave feller 'lone?" and he tried to lie down again.

"Where's the Turk?" Macy asked, as he jerked the youth to his feet and braced him against the wall.

"Where's Turk? Turk gone?"

"Yes, he's gone. Where is he?"

"I flamed 'f I know," said Jim, who now began to realize where he was. "Guess I must be 'sleep, ain't I?"

"You've been dead drunk," Macy answered.

"Now, tell me. Where's that boy?"

"Oh! he's gone down th' sewer!"

"Down the sewer?"

"Yes. That's what Turk said he'd do with him when he came back from cracking th' crib, anyhow."

"What crib?"

"Didn't tell me. I must 'a' got full, an' they left me here. I was goin' with 'em."

Under the severe shaking which Macy had continued to give him, "Seedy Jim" now began to collect his scattered wits so as to be able to talk.

"Who went with the Turk?" Macy asked.

"Soft Patter went with him. When we brought the boy here, Turk sent me to bring Soft Patter. I found him, an' then we all took a drink or two of rum, an' that's th' last I can remember."

"Where was the boy then?"

"He was in th' other room with his hands tied."

Macy allowed Jim to drop to the floor again, and once more took up the candle and went into the next room.

This time he looked around carefully, and soon found the cords with which Hal Vernet had been bound. Then he next discovered the chips which the boy had made in cutting the hole through the door, and understood at once that he had made his escape.

Macy was wild with rage, and poured forth a volley of "cuss-words" piratically.

Was "Sheeny the Turk" playing him false? He was half-inclined to believe it; but, did he not have the advantage of the "Turk" in every way? And was it not to the "Turk's" interest to serve him? He certainly thought so. No, he concluded, the "Turk" was not playing him false; but, falling in with "Soft Patter," the latter had enticed him away. Anyhow, he would see the "Turk" on the morrow, and find out what was going on.

Going back to "Seedy Jim" in the adjoining room again, Macy roused him up from his sleep once more, and placed his hat on his head for him.

"Come," he said, "you worthless young jail-bird, and I'll see if I can get you home." And half-leading and half-carrying him, he managed to get him out of the room and down the stairs.

He had forgotten to blow out the candle or to close the door.

Once down the stairs he gave the youth such a lively shaking that he succeeded in waking him, and then assisting his staggering steps, led him from the house.

And then it was that they were seen by Dick Smith and Detective Sharp.

"Are you sure he is the man?" the detective asked.

"Yes," answered Dick, "he's the man, sure."

"Well, we'll let him go. I know him, and where he lives, and can easily find him if he's wanted. We'll go into the house though, and see what is going on in there."

"I'm with you," said Dick, "every time!" He now had the "detective fever," and decidedly badly, too.

The detective entered the hall, followed by Dick, and lighted a match as Macy Blanding had done.

Then they ascended the stairs.

On coming out with "Seedy Jim," Macy had left one of the doors open, as mentioned; and the detective, seeing the light in the room, did not hesitate to enter. And, seeing no one there, motioned Dick to close the door after them.

"This must be the place we want, Dick," he said. "Now, let's see what is in here." And taking up the candle he passed into the adjoining room.

The first he noticed were the chips Hal had made in cutting his way out, and from them his eye naturally turned toward the hole in the door. But he said nothing.

Next, he found the cords that had held Hal's wrists, and picked them up.

"Hal!" he exclaimed, "some one has been a prisoner here in this room, and has escaped. See this string, Dick? Now, was the prisoner man or boy? The ties, or loops, in this string will just about fit a boy's wrists. Hold up your hands."

Dick obeyed.

The detective arranged the string as nearly as possible on Dick's wrists as it had been on Hal's, and then said:

"There! the loops fit your wrists, and therefore we'll say the prisoner was a boy. Now, who cut the cord? If any one besides the prisoner had done it, it would show one clean cut; but it don't. It has been cut here and there and everywhere, leaving long ends and short ends. Therefore, we'll say the boy prisoner cut it himself."

"Then, having got his hands free, what did he do next? See those chips there on the floor, Dick? and the hole cut in the door? Now, let's examine that." And as he spoke the detective held the light close to the hole, and looked carefully at the cutting.

"Did Hal have a knife?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Dick.

"Did you ever see it?"

"Yes."

"What kind was it? large or small?"

"It was just like this one," said Dick drawing a two-blade jack-knife from his pocket. "We both bought our knives at the same time."

"Hal!" the detective exclaimed. "This is fortunate. Now, Dick, you set to work and make this hole a little larger. Work as though your life depended on it."

"All right," said Dick, and to work he went.

When he had made the hole about an inch larger the detective bade him stop, and then, after stirring up the chips, asked him if he could distinguish his chips from those that were on the floor first.

"No," said Dick, "of course not. They are all about the same size and shape."

"That is another proof that the prisoner was a boy," said the detective. "You see his strength in cutting was about equal to yours. Now, I will make a few chips, and we'll see if they are larger than the others." And taking the knife he made the hole an inch larger still.

"There," he said, "you see how much larger my chips are. That settles the question. The prisoner was a boy, and we have every reason to believe it was Hal Vernet. Now, I—" But he was suddenly interrupted by Dick, who at that moment stooped and picked up something, exclaiming:

"This settles it! The prisoner was Hal! Here is a button off his coat!"

"That's a lucky find!" exclaimed the detective. "Now we are sure of our ground. We know that Hal Vernet has been a prisoner here, and that he has escaped. He may have escaped only a short time ago, and may be at home now. We'll go right there and see." And they left the house at once.

True enough, when they reached Dick's home Hal was there, having just arrived.

It was a joyful return. Little Joe, who had not closed his eyes in sleep, now cried again, and the widow's eyes, too, were dimmed by tears. While Harry, who had returned home about an hour before, quite in despair, now laughed with gladness. In that family Hal was son and brother, well-beloved.

Hal told of his adventures to an eagerly attentive audience, and when he was done Detective Sharp said:

"There is a mystery back of all this, which does not appear upon the surface. Why do they want to kill Hal Vernet?"

"That's plain enough," said Dick Smith. "It is Seedy Jim's work. He wants to put Hal out of the way."

"That may account for his part in it," said the detective, "but not for Sheeny the Turk's and Macy Blanding's. They have a deeper interest in it, and I must find out what it is. Seedy Jim would never have got them to help him put the boy out of the way."

"By the way, Hal, have you the parcel yet that you started to deliver?"

"Yes," Hal answered, "here it is, but I see I have burst the wrapper."

"So much the better," said the detective. "Perhaps we can see its contents." And he took the parcel. But as he did so the wrapper suddenly gave way and its contents fell to the floor, proving to be nothing more nor less than two old newspapers.

"There! just as I suspected! This was a put-up job on you, my boy, from beginning to end. I must make it my business to find out what the object was."

"Now, Hal, my boy, I want you to do a little detective work for me to-morrow. Can you?"

"I would like to," said Hal, "but I don't think I can get away from my work."

"Oh, yes you can, as well as not," said the detective. "I want you to go home with me now, and help me to-morrow. Dick can explain to your employer where you are, and if he does not like it I will get you another place and a better one. Besides

it is not safe for you around here now, if such rascals as Sheeny the Turk are after your life."

"That is so," said Mrs. Smith. "I think, Hal, I would not go to work again till Mr. Sharp finds out what is going on."

"Well," said Hal, "if you think so, I won't."

"Then you'll help me to-morrow?" the detective asked.

"Yes, sir. I'll go with you, if Mrs. Smith is willing."

"You have no objections, madam?"

"No, sir; for I think the boy will come to no harm with you."

"You may depend on that, madam. I simply want him to watch a boy for me to-morrow, and he will be in no danger."

"Very well; he may go if he wants to."

And so it was arranged. And when Steven Sharp returned home, Hal Vernet went with him, having laid aside his uniform and dressed himself in his best.

CHAPTER XI.

"WHOM DO YOU SUSPECT?"

EARLY next morning Detective Sharp and Hal Vernet entered police head-quarters, and the detective took Hal with him into the presence of the Inspector.

"What lad is this? the lost Charley Ross?" the Inspector asked, glancing up from his papers and reports.

"No," answered the detective, "he is a young friend of mine. My protegee, I will say. He met with quite an adventure last night. He was kidnapped by Sheeny the Turk, who intended to kill him and drop him into the sewer. He overheard the Turk and Soft Patter plan to rob Mr. Giles's house, managed to escape, went and warned the inmates of the house, and the burglars were captured. He is quite a hero."

"So, this is the boy, is it?" said the Inspector. "I was just reading the report of the arrest when you entered. He is a brave little fellow. Why does Sheeny the Turk want him out of the way, though?"

"I don't know," the detective replied, "but I shall look into the case."

"What about the Giles diamonds?"

"Nothing thus far. There is some secret back of that robbery. That they were stolen by some one in the house I am certain; and I think I know whom. And last night Sheeny the Turk and Soft Patter gained entrance into the house without any trouble, in a way that makes me think they had some assistance within. There is some connection between the two cases. I am going up to Mr. Giles's now."

"And, by the way, Macy Blanding—that slippery chap we were after last fall—seems to be connected with Sheeny the Turk in his plot against this boy. I don't want him to be allowed to see the Turk. Will you attend to it?"

"Yes, I'll fix that."

"All right. Now, I want to put the Squirrel on Macy Blanding's track to-day, and if you think it best to continue watching the pawn-shops for the diamonds, please put another man on with me for that purpose."

"All right. Keep me posted on your movements. But, what are you going to do with your young friend?"

"He is going to do a little detective work for me to-day."

The detective and Hal then left the office, and the detective found his assistant, the "Squirrel," waiting to see him.

Sharp gave him some instructions, and then the three left the building: Steve and Hal going uptown, and the "Squirrel" down.

"Now, my boy," said the detective, as they turned from Bleecker street into Broadway, "I'll tell you what I want of you. But first let me ask a question: Did you see Mr. Giles's son last night while you were in the house—a boy about your own size and age?"

"No, sir," answered Hal. "I did not see him."

"Well, Mr. Giles has such a son, and he is the boy I want you to watch to-day. You can keep your eyes upon the house till you see him come out, and then, if you can, you may make his acquaintance. I want you to let me know to-night whom you have seen him talking with, and where he has spent the day. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir; and I'll do the best I can for you."

"Of course. Well, here is some money for you, to buy your dinner with, and so forth. And, remember this: if you see the boy give anything to any person, do not lose sight of that person till you know who he is and where he lives. Come to my house to-night at seven o'clock."

"If, however, anything turns up that you think I ought to know about at once, go and tell the Inspector at the central. But that is not likely to happen."

"All right," said Hal. "I'll tend to it."

They walked leisurely up Broadway to Eighth street, then crossed over through Clinton Place to Sixth avenue, where they took the Elevated Railroad, and then were soon in the neighborhood of the Giles mansion.

"Now," said the detective, as they neared the house, "here I will leave you. You must keep your eyes fixed upon the house. Let me see what sort of detective ability you possess. Who knows but you may some day become one of us?"

They both laughed, and the detective went on to the house and rung the bell.

He was without disguise.

The door was soon opened, by the same man-servant the detective had seen on the occasion of his

former visit, and to him he again tendered his card, asking him to present it to Mr. Giles at once.

This time the card bore the detective's true name. No further need was there for secrecy, now that a robbery had been committed that was known to all the household.

In a moment the servant returned, and the detective was conducted into the library.

Mr. Giles glanced first at the card and then at the detective, in a perfectly bewildered manner.

"I see you are puzzled, sir," the detective said, as the servant left the room. "I am not now in disguise."

"Oh! then you were in disguise yesterday?"

"Yes, sir."

"Wonderful, wonderful."

"So your house was entered last night by burglars, Mr. Giles."

"Yes; and but for a brave little boy who warned us of their presence, they would no doubt have carried off a considerable amount of property."

"Have you any idea, sir, how they gained entrance into the house?"

"Yes, sir. Either the front doors were not securely fastened when the house was closed, or the burglars skillfully picked the locks and slipped the bolts, though I fail to understand how they could accomplish that."

"Then you favor the idea that the doors were not securely locked?"

"Yes, sir. And yet, the butler says he locked them; and he is a very careful servant."

"Let us see, then," said the detective, "whether there are grounds for supposing the doors were unlocked after he locked them. Will you allow me, sir, to examine the locks and the hall?"

Mr. Giles's face paled.

"Certainly," he answered, and led the way into the hall.

"Now," said the detective, "here are two bolts. One is at the top of the door, and the other at the bottom. Then there is the lock. To open this door from without, without damaging it, is simply impossible."

"I would like to see the butler."

"I am he," said the man who had admitted the detective into the house, and who was now standing near.

"I notice," said the detective, "that the top bolt of the door is beyond a man's reach. Will you inform me how you move it?"

"Yes, sir. I use this iron hook."

And as the butler spoke, he took from a nail behind the door an iron rod, about three feet in length, with a hook at one end.

"Did you find that hook in its place when you came to lock the doors, after the burglars were captured and taken away?"

"Yes, sir. That is all?" as the detective stood thoughtful.

"Yes; that is all. I would like to see, though, the servant who swept and dusted the hall this morning."

"Call her," said Mr. Giles to the butler.

In a few moments a neat appearing young Irish girl came.

"At what hour did you clean this hall this morning?" the detective asked.

"About six o'clock, sir."

"Did you notice anything particularly out of order?"

"No, sir."

"Not even those chairs?" pointing to two reception chairs.

"Well, sir, one of those was not precisely in its place, but it was no doubt pushed aside in the excitement last night."

The chairs in question were two high backed, leather-covered affairs, of antique style.

"You dusted them both, I suppose?"

"I wiped them with a damp cloth, sir."

"Did you notice a mark of any kind on the seat of either, as though a person had stood on it?"

"How did you know about that, sir?"

"I am merely asking the question. What sort of mark was it?"

"Well, sir," said the girl, "on the chair that I found a little out of place, there was the print of a naked foot. I could make it out distinctly. The floor was a little dusty, and the foot left its mark on the leather."

"That is all," said the detective, and Mr. Giles led the way into the library again.

It will be seen that the detective's first unexpected discovery of a footprint on a chair-bottom, had led him to make inquiries in that direction once more. He now firmly believed that Mr. Giles's son was not only a thief, but an accomplice of Sheeny the Turk. A strange position for a rich man's son, but the proofs appeared positive.

"Well," Mr. Giles queried, as he closed the door, "what is your opinion?"

"My opinion is," said the detective, "that the door was opened by some one in the house, after the butler had locked it for the night, and that the person who stole the diamonds and the one who opened the door for the burglars, are one and the same."

"And whom do you suspect?" Mr. Giles then asked, trying to force himself to be calm.

"Do you desire me to name the person?"

"I do."

"I suspect your own son."

"My God! then my own suspicions are well-founded!"

"It was your own suspicions that turned my attention upon him at first, Mr. Giles."

"How can that be? I mentioned it to no one, sir."

"I read your mind, sir."

"Well," said Mr. Giles, determinedly, "I desire

you to go on, sir, and find the lost diamonds, if possible, and bring me indisputable proof of my son's guilt. Until that is furnished, I must regard the boy as innocent. Poor boy! evil association has done its work with him!"

"The case is now more in the way of a private detective, sir," said Sharp. "But since I have gone thus far in it, I will carry it out for you."

"May I ask you whether Mrs. Giles entertains the same suspicions, sir?"

"I fear she does," was the reply, "but neither of us has ventured to mention it to the other."

"It is a sad thing," said the detective, "and I earnestly hope I may be able to prove the boy innocent."

"It is sad, indeed," said Mr. Giles, "and I hope as you do. The boy's life has been anything but a pleasant one. But I will tell you about him when I see you again. At present I must beg to bring our interview to a close. I am almost overcome with grief."

The detective rose to go.

"I will report to you at the earliest possible moment, sir," he said, "and if your boy is guilty, you can then take the proper steps toward his correction. On the other hand, if I can prove his innocence I will relieve your mind at once. Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning," said Mr. Giles. And the detective went away.

CHAPTER XII.

A CLEW AT LAST.

MEANWHILE, Hal Vernet was not idle.

Detective Sharp had been in the house but a few moments when a boy came out, and much to his surprise, Hal recognized him.

"Why!" he exclaimed to himself, "kick me if that ain't Ikey Moses, the boy Dick Smith whipped one day on the Bowery. What in the world can he be doing here? He's coming this way, I guess, and I'll ask him."

The boy was Mr. Giles's son.

When he came near to where Hal was standing, the latter said:

"Hallo! Ikey Moses, what are you doing away up here?"

The boy gave a start of surprise, and glanced at Hal.

"My name is Henry Giles," he said. "You have made a mistake."

"Mistake your grandmother!" cried Hal. "Do you think I don't know you? You're the boy Dick Smith whipped one day down in the Bowery!"

"I tell you you are mistaken in the person," said Master Giles. "Please do not address me again." And he went on down the avenue.

"Well!" Hal exclaimed in amazement, "if this don't just take the cake! I am almost certain he is Ikey Moses; but, if he is Mr. Giles's son, as he says he is, I must keep him in sight."

The boy walked slowly down the avenue to Forty-second street, turned into that thoroughfare, Hal following him carefully, and at length entered the waiting-room of the Grand Central Depot.

Hal was in doubt what to do; but, knowing that he must keep the boy in sight, he followed him into the room.

Young Giles was glancing around, as though he expected to meet some one, and taking advantage of the fact that his back was toward him at the moment he entered, Hal slipped behind a convenient door that stood partly open.

Not finding the person he evidently expected to meet, the boy sat down, and, as it happened, right by an open window.

"Now," Hal thought, "the place where I ought to be is right under that window. Then if any one speaks to the boy there, I can hear what is said." And he watched his chance to leave the room unseen.

Presently young Giles turned and looked out the window for a moment, and Hal instantly slipped from the room. Then he made his way to the window, and posted himself under it to listen.

For half an hour or more the boy waited in silence, two or three times going to the door to make sure that young Giles was still in the same place, and at last his patience was rewarded. He saw a man enter the room, whom he recognized as the man who had left the parcel at the telegraph office on the previous night.

"Ginger!" he exclaimed under his breath, "that's the very man who got me into trouble last night! Now, I must keep my ears open wide."

"Hallo! Ikey, you're here, eh?" he heard the man exclaim as he approached the boy.

"There! I was sure of it!" Hal thought.

"Yes, here I am," the boy answered. "Have you heard what has happened?"

"No," said Blanding, for he the man was, "what is it?"

"Why, dad and Soft Patter have been taken in."

"The deuce!" Macy cried. "Where?"

"At Mr. Giles's house, last night."

Here was a grand revelation for Hal Vernet. Ikey Moses was "Sheeny the Turk's" son. He remembered having heard the "Turk," last night, telling "Soft Patter" that the person in the next room was "only my boy Ikey," when in fact it was Hal himself, a prisoner.

Macy Blanding uttered a fierce oath, at the boy's words, and Hal would no doubt have heard much of interest to himself; but at that moment a rough hand was clapped on his shoulder, and a voice exclaimed:

"Why are you listening here, boy?"

It was a policeman.

Macy Blanding and Ikey Moses both sprung to

their feet and looked out, and Macy recognized Hal at once.

Hal was making some excuse to the policeman, and it was evidently a most satisfactory one, for he was allowed to go at once.

"Thunder!" Macy exclaimed, "that boy has heard all we said! I must follow him and— But, you meet me here again at one o'clock this afternoon!"

"All right," said Ikey; "if I can I will." And they parted; Macy following Hal Vernet, and Ikey going back to the Giles mansion.

"Ten thousand curses upon Levi Moses's head!" Macy Blanding muttered. "He has spoilt my game! I wonder how he found the place out? He has no doubt followed me. Oh! the fool, the fool!"

"Well, I'll settle this young Vernet now, for good. He shan't live to trouble me, anyhow. And then I must see the Turk at once, and learn just how the case stands."

"I was a fool to take him into it at all, but I wanted to use him to get young Vernet out of the way. I didn't like to tackle that sort of work myself. I'll do it myself now though, and I'll make sure work of it, too." And keeping his eyes upon our hero he followed him to the station of the Elevated Railroad, where they both boarded the same train for down-town.

"Confound that policeman!" Hal was thinking. "But for him I might have learned something of greater importance for Mr. Sharp. I wonder if Ikey and the man looked out when he spoke to me? I forgot to take notice."

"Well, I guess when I tell Mr. Sharp that Mr. Giles's boy is the son of Sheeny the Turk, he'll be a little surprised, anyhow. I wonder how in the world it is? It is a mystery too deep for me, and I give it up."

"But, I won't forget something else that came into my head when I learned that Ikey is the Turk's son, and I'll attend to it at once. Lordy! won't Mr. Sharp be surprised though! if it is as I think? Well, I'll soon find out."

Little did the boy imagine that Macy Blanding was following him, determined to have his life.

Our hero was about to do a very unwise thing, as you shall see. Having in his possession an important clue, he should have followed Detective Sharp's advice, and gone at once to police headquarters; but he decided to act for himself.

Detective Sharp had told him about the diamonds stolen from Mrs. Giles, and of his suspicions that her son was the thief; and when Hal found that Ikey Moses was an inmate of the house, however he came there, and that he was the son of "Sheeny the Turk," he suddenly remembered that on the previous night he had seen the Turk hiding something under the bricks of the hearth in his rooms in Baxter street.

What was more natural then, than for him to ask himself the question: "Was he not concealing the Giles diamonds?"

There Hal was going, to find out the truth of the matter. And perhaps any one else would have taken the same course.

When the train stopped at Chatham Square the boy left the car and descended to the street, and lost no time in making his way to his destination.

Making sure of the house he entered the hall, no one paying any attention to him, and went up the stairs.

The doors of the Turk's rooms were closed, but not locked, and opening one of them Hal went into the room where he had been a prisoner.

He was almost trembling with excitement, and pausing only long enough to assure himself that he was alone, he advanced into the adjoining room and to the hearth, and knelt down where he had seen the Turk kneeling.

Had he been less nervous he would no doubt have heard the door creak slightly, and have beheld the evil face of Macy Blanding peering in upon him. But he did not hear the sound.

Quickly brushing away the ashes, he tried to lift one of the bricks, but could get no hold of it. For several minutes he tried in vain, and Macy Blanding during that time advanced silently into the room and closed the door behind him.

Presently Hal thought of his knife, and opening its largest blade he inserted it between the bricks, and one of them was quickly displaced. Then it was an easy matter to remove the other three or four that were loose, and when this was done a small package was revealed.

This Hal brought out and quickly opened, and Macy Blanding's eyes fell upon a wealth of diamonds such as he had never seen before.

He drew a knife from his breast and advanced a step toward the boy, who, all unconscious of his danger, was admiring the sparkling jewels.

"Ah—ha!" Macy thought, "last night was not the Turk's first raid upon the Giles mansion, eh? Heavens! what a wealth of diamonds! And all mine, too. One quick thrust of this knife, and I will be safe again. But, what ails the boy now?"

And indeed the villain might well ask himself the question; for, suddenly dropping the diamonds, Hal had uttered a low cry, and now gazed fixedly at something which he held in his hand. And that something was the half of a child's necklace, the very counterpart of the piece which Aunt Polly Barker had given to him at her decease.

As Macy Blanding beheld what it was that the boy was looking at so intently, his face grew suddenly as pale as death. Was the hand of Providence at work, to place this clew so unexpectedly into the boy's hands? He almost believed it; but he was now more than ever resolved to have the boy's life, and raising his knife he advanced upon his victim with cat-like steps.

If a rescuer was to come, he had barely five seconds of time in which to act.

When the "Squirrel" left the central police station, after having received instructions from Detective Sharp, he started at once for Catherine street, to find Macy Blanding.

He knew that "gentleman" by sight, and when he entered the street, in search of the number Detective Sharp had given him, he happened to meet Macy face to face.

The Squirrel was disguised with a false beard, an assortment of which he always carried with him.

Macy proceeded to the Bowery, where he spent some little time in a saloon, and then went up-town to the Grand Central Depot. Of course the Squirrel was shadowing him the while.

He saw him speak to Ikey Moses, but failed to hear what was said, nor did he know who Ikey was. When, however, the policeman spoke to Hal Vernet, and Macy discovered that the boy had been listening, the "Squirrel" heard him say:

"That boy has heard all we said! I must follow him and— But, you meet me here again at one o'clock this afternoon!"

The "Squirrel" was quick to act, and drawing a note book from his pocket he hastily wrote the following:

"STEVEN SHARP.

"300 Mulberry street, City:

"M. B. has appointment with a boy, Grand Central Depot, one o'clock. SQUIRREL."

The message written, he tore out the leaf, and as he left the waiting-room he made a peculiar sign to the officer who had interrupted Hal, and dropped it to the ground.

The officer picked it up, returned the same peculiar sign to the detective, and then the latter started again upon the track of the man he was shadowing. Nor did he lose sight of him.

And thus it was that, as the murderous knife was about to descend upon Hal Vernet, a voice suddenly cried:

"Hold! you cowardly assassin!"

And Macy Blanding, looking quickly around, found himself face to face with a gleaming revolver, held by the steady hand of "Squirrel," the spotter.

It was a striking tableau.

CHAPTER XIII.

DETECTIVE WORK.

Down in the Sixth Ward, occupying the block bounded by Center, Leonard, Elm and Franklin streets, stands New York's famous jail—the Tombs.

It is a low, square building, of the ancient Egyptian style of architecture, and one can scarcely look upon it without his mind reverting to that mysterious land of pyramids, through which flows the river Nile.

It was to this place Detective Sharp hastened on leaving Mr. Giles's house on Fifth avenue.

He entered the building, made his wants known, and was conducted at once to the cell where "Sheeny the Turk" had been lodged for safe-keeping.

"Good-morning, Sheeny," the detective said. "I see you are again deprived of your liberty. What is the charge this time?"

The "Turk" knew Detective Sharp, having had dealings with him on several occasions.

"None of your business what th' charge is, Mr. Long-nose!" he answered, sullenly. "But, you know well enough what it is. You've come here for information."

"And if that is the case, of course you'll oblige me by giving it?"

"No, I won't."

"It might make your own sentence lighter, you know, Sheeny."

"That don't go down!" the "Turk" exclaimed. "You can't catch old birds with chaff, as th' sayin' is; an' I'm an old bird. I don't swallow taffy worth a cent."

"Then you won't talk, eh?"

"Nary talk."

"I'm sorry for that, Sheeny, because I thought you would give me a few points about Macy Blanding."

The "Turk" was not a little surprised.

"Macy Blanding?" he repeated. "What do you s'pose I know about him?"

"Oh! I don't suppose you know very much about him, Sheeny; but I want to find out why it is he desires to put young Hal Vernet out of the way."

"Who's been a spoutin' to you about that?" the "Turk" demanded.

"Oh! never mind who it was."

"Was it Seedy Jim?"

"Maybe."

The "Turk" grinned.

"I don't believe you know anything at all," he said. "You're only a fishin' for facts."

"Shall I tell you what I do know?"

"Yes."

"Well, I know that Macy Blanding is making a tool of you, Sheeny, and if you were only half as smart as you think you are, you'd see through his little game. Suppose you had killed that boy last night, and it had been found out, whose neck, think you, would be in danger?—yours or Macy Blanding's?"

The rascal's face grew white with rage as he saw the truth of this, and the detective thought he would be able to draw from him a full confession of the whole affair. But he was mistaken.

"I'll make it right with Macy Blanding," the "Turk" said, "but I won't tell you anything. All you know is what that boy has told you, and I won't add anything to your knowledge."

"You won't even tell me who it was that opened

the door for you last night, when you and Soft Patter went to Mr. Giles's house?"

"No, I won't. I won't say another word to you. You might as well shut up an' git."

"All right," said the detective. "I'll go. But I may come back to see you again, and then, perhaps, you'll feel more like talking."

From that cell Detective Sharp was conducted to the one occupied by "Soft Patter." He, too, was well acquainted with him.

"Hallo! Soft Patter, what are you here for?" he jocularly asked, as he entered the cell.

"Soft Patter" was in a very despondent frame of mind, and answered doggedly:

"I'm here all along of that fool of a Levi Moses, or Sheeny th' Turk, as he's called."

"Ah!" the detective thought, "I may gain something here. Patter blames the Turk for his arrest, and won't hesitate to tell all he knows." Out aloud he said:

"So, it was the Turk who got you into trouble, eh? Well, I thought so. I didn't believe you would go and tackle a Fifth avenue crib, with the family all at home. By the way, who was it that opened the door to let the Turk in?"

"I don't know who it was. He wouldn't tell me. It was some friend of his, though, I'm sure."

"Didn't you see him when you went in?"

"No; there was no one in th' hall when we went in. Th' door was all unlocked an' ready fer us though."

"That was strange. Do you think it was one of the servants?"

"It must 'a' been. I don't see how else it could be. Sheeny must know some one of 'em, I guess."

"If that is the case, Patter, it is strange that he took you into the job with him; don't you think so?"

"Oh, no! he wanted me to open th' safe. He couldn't open a safe alone to save his life."

"That's it, eh?"

"Yes."

It was evident that Soft Patter knew but little concerning the plan of the attempted robbery. He was quite willing to tell all he knew, but that was not much.

"What do you know about the boy the Turk kidnapped last night? I mean the one who followed you and Sheeny to Mr. Giles's house, and gave the alarm. Do you know why he wanted to kill him?"

"I've been a-thinkin' about that boy," said "Soft Patter," "an' it's a mighty curious affair. It seems he was in one of Sheeny's rooms, an' heard us plan to rob Mr. Giles. I asked th' Turk who was in th' next room, but he said it was only his boy Ikey. Said he'd been givin' him a lickin', an' had tied him up to punish him."

"H's boy Ikey?" the detective exclaimed. "Has the Turk a son?"

"Yes."

"How old is he?"

"About fifteen, I should think."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No. I supposed, of course, he was the boy who was in th' room last night at th' Turk's; but when I found it was that other lad, who got us captured, I knowed it wasn't."

The detective went again to "Sheeny the Turk's" cell.

"Say, Sheeny," he said, "where is your boy Ikey?"

"How did you know I had a boy?"

"Oh! no matter about that. I only thought perhaps you'd like to have some one to look after him a little, that's all."

"Well, when I want any one to look after him, it won't be you, Mr. Long-nose. Ikey is all right, an' if you want to know where he is, go an' find him."

"Very well. I shall have to do so. You know I'm a pretty good hand at finding a person, Sheeny."

From the Tombs the detective went at once to Baxter street, and to the house where "Sheeny the Turk's" rooms were situated.

On the ground floor of the house was a clothing-store, kept by one Solomon Kloski, an old Jew, and it was to that store that the detective bent his steps.

"Mein Gott in himmel!" the old Jew ejaculated, as he recognized his visitor, and his face at once assumed a decidedly troubled expression. "I peen glad to see you, Mister Sharps, maybe. How you vas, eh? Coom, und ein glass beer habe mit mich. Nein? Do kein mehr beer trinken any more? Coom, und ein segar habe." And catching hold of the detective's sleeve he tried to entice him away from his store, uttering the above Dutch *patois* with great volubility.

"Now, don't get frightened, Solomon, don't get frightened," the detective said, at the same time motioning the old man to sit down and keep cool. "I am not here on business this time. I only want to ask you a few questions."

The Jew felt better at once.

"Vat you vants to know 'bout, eh?" he asked.

"Well, I want to ask you if you know Levi Moses, who has rooms in this house, and used to live here. Do you?"

"Ya, I knows him. Cheeny the Turk, dhey calls him. He vas peen der chug in, about six months, maybe. Dat der man? Ya, I knows him."

"Yes, that's the man. Now, can you tell me where his boy Ikey is?"

"Dat leetle Ikey Moses? No, I don't know where he vas. When his mutter died ein young man cooms und takes him away. I don't know where he peen gone to."

"Who was the young man? did you know him?"

"No, I don't know his name, but he vas ein friend mit der Turk."

"Have you seen him around here since?"

"Ya, I peen seen him in Mister O'Klory's saloon, somedimes, maybe."

"Well, good-day, Mr. Kloski. I'll drop in and see Mr. O'Glory. I hope you are not buying any stolen—"

"So help me," and the old man raised his hands on high, as though about to invoke high heaven to bear witness to his innocence, "I never—" But the detective went away, laughing.

Entering Mike O'Glory's place he advanced to the bar, and that worthy individual was scarcely less frightened than the old Jew had been.

"Good-morning!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad to see you!" And in short order a box of cigars was placed at the detective's disposal, followed by a bottle of wine.

"Are ye lookin' for some one?"

"No," said the detective, as he helped himself to a cigar, "I merely dropped in for a little information."

"Phat is it you'd be after knowin'?"

"Can you tell me where Sheeny the Turk's boy Ikey is?"

"Indade I can that!" Mike exclaimed. "Do ye know Macy Blanding?"

"Yes."

"Well, th' b'y is livin' with him; or was, th' last I knew of him."

The detective went out, and turned his steps toward head-quarters.

A new idea now filled his mind. Had the "Turk's" boy entered the Giles mansion as a sneak, concealed himself in some convenient place till the house was closed, and then opened the front door for his worthy parent? It certainly looked reasonable enough.

But, would this theory account for the missing diamonds? There was yet a mountain of mystery to be removed ere all would be clear, and the detective hardly knew which way to turn.

First of all, however, he would go to head-quarters and see whether there was any communication from the "Squirrel." And he hastened on in that direction.

And, barely was he out of sight from the house where "Sheeny the Turk" had lived, when Hal Vernet entered it, followed closely by Macy Blanding, and he, in turn, followed by the "Squirrel."

If Detective Sharp had seen them, it was certain that he would have turned back; but he did not, and in due time arrived at the central department, where he found the "Squirrel's" message awaiting him.

"Ah!" he thought, as he read it, "Macy Blanding is to meet a boy, eh? Can it be the Turk's son? Squirrel, you're a credit to the force. I'll be on hand."

CHAPTER XIV.

CLOSING IN.

To say that Macy Blanding was surprised when he found himself "covered" by the "Squirrel's" revolver, but ill expresses his consternation. He was, for the moment, completely paralyzed.

Hal Vernet had sprung to his feet at the "Squirrel's" first word, and now stood looking on, trembling as he realized his narrow escape.

"Come," said the "Squirrel," "let that knife drop to the floor, Blanding, and then, as they say out West, up with your hands. I mean business, and if you make an attempt to escape, or to draw a pistol, I'll bore a hole right through you. Don't trifle with this court."

There was a certain something in the tone and manner of the young detective, which told Blanding more plainly than words that he meant "shoot," and the knife was instantly dropped. Then the rascal held his hands above his head, and the "Squirrel" advanced and relieved him of a revolver which he carried in his hip pocket.

"Now," said the "Squirrel," "there's no danger of your 'going off.' Please let me place these bracelets on your wrists, and then we'll be all fixed. No need to chin about it, for it must be did. You've got to go with me to the Central."

There was really no help for it, so Macy allowed himself to be handcuffed, and then the "Squirrel" put away his weapon.

"Well, my lad," he said, turning to Hal, "what have you found?"

"I've found the diamonds that were stolen from Mr. Giles's house," Hal replied.

And as he spoke, he picked the jewels up and put them into his pocket.

"The deuce you have!" cried the "Squirrel."

"How did you know they were here?"

"I saw Sheeny the Turk put them here. Of course I didn't know what was in the package then, but this morning Mr. Sharp told me that some diamonds had been stolen from Mrs. Giles, and when I found that Ikey Moses—Sheeny's boy—was living in the Giles house, I at once thought I would find them right here; and I did."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the "Squirrel," "but you're a lucky kid. I'd give almost a year's pay to have found them."

"You may say you did, if it will do you any good," said Hal.

"See here, boy," the young detective cried; "don't say that again! You don't know the Squirrel. When I get my spurs, it will be by my own work. Don't think I'm mad, for I ain't; but just remember that my color is true blue, every day in the week. Come, we must be off to head-quarters."

"All right; I'm ready," said Hal.

"Well, come along then. Keep those sparklers well out of sight. Lordy! what a surprise we'll give Sharp!"

And taking his prisoner by the arm, he led him down the stairs, and the three left the house.

On arriving at police head-quarters they found Detective Sharp, and his surprise at seeing Macy

Blanding a prisoner, after the telegram he had received from the "Squirrel," can be imagined.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"It means that this man was about to plunge a knife into your young friend here, when I arrested him. The boy had a narrow escape, I tell you. Show Mr. Sharp what you've got in your pocket," addressing our hero.

Hal drew forth the small package, and opening the paper, disclosed the sparkling diamonds to the detective's wondering gaze.

"In the name of all that's wonderful!" cried Sharp, "where did you find those?"

Hal explained.

"You say Ikey Moses is an inmate of Mr. Giles's house?"

"Yes, sir. He calls himself Henry Giles, and says he is M. Giles' son."

Macy Blanding was now as pale as death itself.

"The jig is up," he thought, "and I may as well make a clean breast of the whole matter. Oh! Sheeny the Turk; ten million curses upon your head for this!" He was about to speak, when Hal Vernet said:

"See this piece of chain, Mr. Sharp. I found it with the diamonds. What do you think of it?"

The detective took the chain from the boy's hand, and immediately exclaimed:

"Great heavens! boy, do you know what this is?"

"Yes, sir; I knew it the moment I saw it. It is the lost part of the chain which Aunt Polly gave me before she died."

"Ah! Macy Blanding," the detective cried, as a new light dawned upon the mystery, which he was quick to perceive and understand. "I fancy I can now touch bottom in this case. A little light begins to dawn upon us. I can see into your infernal scheme, and now know why you desired to put this boy out of the way. If there is any law to touch your case this time, my fine fellow, you shall feel its full weight."

"If you will let me down easy," the villain began, "I will make a clean breast of it all, and—"

"We don't want anything of the sort," said Sharp. "Your confession comes too late in the day. Officer, take him to jail, and commit him under a charge of attempted murder. I will be on hand at his hearing, and I'll have proof enough to send him below, too."

Macy remonstrated, but he was not listened to, and a policeman led him away.

"Now, Squirrel," Detective Sharp then said, "you go and procure a warrant for the arrest of James Seeds, and take him in. Make it a charge of abduction. I want to use him as a witness against Macy Blanding and Sheeny the Turk. You'll find him at the address I gave you this morning. Then, when you have done that, go to my house and wait there till I come. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Well, be off then, and don't forget to go to my house when you are through with the job."

"Suppose I can't find the boy, though?"

"In that case let me know it by two o'clock, and I'll get some one else for the other work."

"All right." And the "Squirrel" went out.

"Now, my lad," the detective said, "we'll go in and see the Inspector," and he led the way into that gentleman's office.

The Inspector was at leisure at the moment, and the detective said:

"Well, sir, the lost diamonds are found."

"Found? Sharp, you're a very Prince of Detectives. How, when and where did you find them?"

"It was not I who found them, sir, but this boy."

"The deuce."

"Exactly so, sir. And a wonderful find it was, too; although had it not been for the Squirrel, the boy would have lost his life. As it was, he had a narrow escape."

"Indeed! Give me the facts in the case."

The detective did so.

"Ah! Blanding is caught by the heels at last, is he?"

"Yes, sir; and I'm going to put it to him strong!"

"What about the mystery you hint at, that is connected with your young friend's life?"

"Well, I shall now follow up the clew, and see where it will end. You can see for yourself, sir, the way it seems to point. I think when I see you again I shall have a tale to unfold."

"You must finish the business up to-day, Sharp; for I want you to take hold of that murder case tomorrow. The boys are at a standstill."

"All right, sir; I'll set to work and wind this affair up at once. Come, Hal, let's get some dinner and then to work."

The detective and his protegee went to a neighboring restaurant, where each ate a hearty dinner, and then they started up Broadway.

"Where are you going now?" Hal asked.

"Well," said the detective, "we'll take a walk for half an hour, to settle our dinner and to kill time, and then we'll take a cab and go to the Grand Central Depot."

"To see Ikey?"

"Yes; and not only to see him, but to ~~see~~ him."

"I'm sorry for that," said Hal. "But what about Seedy Jim?"

"Well, I think they'll send him to jail again. I should think you would be glad to see him go, too, after the attempts he has made to kill you."

"But I am not, sir. I'd rather see him given a good place to go to work, where he could become better, instead of worse, as he surely will if he is sent back to jail."

"You're a good boy," the detective remarked, "and I wish that there were many more people with your kindness of heart toward the jail bird."

The two walked up Broadway as far as Union Square, where the detective engaged a cab, and from there they were driven to the Grand Central Depot.

When they arrived there it was one o'clock, and a few minutes later Hal touched the detective's arm, and said:

"There he comes!"

"Is that the boy?"

"Yes."

The detective opened the cab door as the boy drew near, and gave a low whistle to attract his attention.

The boy looked around at once, and the detective asked:

"Is your name Henry Giles?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you're the boy I was sent for. Mr. Macy Blanding was to have met you here at one o'clock, but he couldn't come, so he sent a cab for you to come to him."

"Where is he?"

"I am to take you to a house on West — street."

"All right." And the boy sprang into the cab at once. But the instant he saw Hal Vernet his face grew white, and he attempted to get out again. But it was too late. The detective forced him back into his seat, and said:

"Not so fast, Ikey; you can't get out."

"Who are you?" the frightened boy asked.

"I am a police detective. You are arrested for stealing Mrs. Giles's diamonds."

The lad was now greatly alarmed, and began to cry.

"I wouldn't 'a' done it," he said, "only my dad made me do it."

"I am really sorry for you," the detective said, "but I am afraid you will have to go to jail. There is only one way I can help you."

"How is that?" the boy quickly asked.

"Well, if you will tell me everything you know about Macy Blanding, and how he came to get you into Mr. Giles's house, I'll try and keep you out of jail."

"Oh! I'll tell you everything!" the boy quickly declared.

"Well, wait till we reach our destination then, and I'll listen to you."

In a short time the cab arrived at Detective Sharp's house, and bidding the driver wait for him he got out, with the two boys, and entered.

The "Squirrel" was there awaiting further orders, having arrested "Seedy Jim" and put him into jail.

Detective Sharp led Ikey Moses into a private room, where the boy confessed everything. And when he came out again the detective said:

"Now, Squirrel, I want you and Hal to stay here till I return. I may be gone all the afternoon, so make yourselves right at home. And, Squirrel, do not let Ikey Moses leave your sight."

"All right, sir."

Detective Sharp then left the house and entered the cab, and was driven down-town.

He went straight to the Tombs, and to "Sheeny the Turk's" cell.

"Well, Sheeny," he said, "your boy is found."

"I don't believe it," was the surly response.

"I can prove it to you, Sheeny. We found him in Mr. Giles's house, on Fifth avenue. He it was who opened the door for you last night."

The "Turk" was surprised.

"Nor is that all," the detective continued. "We have found the diamonds your boy stole from Mrs. Giles, and gave to you. We found them under the bricks of the hearth, in your rooms. You see, Sheeny, we have a way of prying into secrets."

The "Turk" had not a word to say. He could only sit and stare at the detective, with eyes and mouth open wide.

"As I had business down this way, I thought I'd drop in and let you know how we are progressing. So long, old man! I'll see you later!" And the detective went away.

Going thence into the police court, he obtained a search-warrant to search Macy Blanding's rooms at his boarding-house, and set out at once to execute the business.

CHAPTER XV.

COLLECTING EVIDENCE.

WHEN Detective Sharp arrived at the boarding-house kept by Mrs. Seeds, the mother of "Seedy Jim," he read aloud the search-warrant to that lady and was invited at once into the house and conducted up-stairs to Macy Blanding's room.

The door was found locked, but the detective soon overcame that trifling obstacle. Taking a curious-looking little instrument from his pocket, he adjusted it, and then on inserting it into the keyhole, the door was opened instantly.

"There we are," he said, "and no trouble at all. I will be through here in a very short time, Mrs. Seeds." And he entered the room alone, closing the door after him, thus balking Mrs. Seeds in her feverish desire to learn what he was after. Then he began his search.

In one corner stood a trunk. It was locked, but the curious-looking little instrument that had opened the door so readily, fitted this smaller lock equally well, and the contents of the trunk were soon exposed to view.

These the detective examined, handling each article with as much care as though the property were his own. He discovered nothing, however, to throw any additional light upon the case in hand.

Replacing the things as he had found them, he closed and locked the trunk, and then turned his attention to a bureau which stood in the front part of the room between two windows.

This article of furniture contained several drawers, all of which were locked, and again the curious-looking little instrument was brought into use.

The first drawer that was opened was a small one, and was found to contain letters and papers of various sorts, to which the detective gave careful attention. One by one he examined them, and presently, his eye falling upon a certain letter, he uttered a low ejaculation of surprise.

That letter was contained in a large, yellow envelope, which had the appearance of having been wet, and on which the superscription was this:

"MRS. LANGDON GILES,

"No. — Fifth avenue, N. Y."

"Personal."

The letter was dated "Chambers street Hospital, January 12, 18—," and to the detective it revealed everything in connection with the mystery of young Hal Vernet's life. It was far more than he had hoped to find. Nothing further was needed to guide him to the proof of the boy's identity—that proof, in fact, was in his hands now; but, detective-like, he must prove the validity of it.

"Ah! the hand of the Deity is in this!" he exclaimed, half-aloud, when he had perused the letter carefully to the end, "and I am the agent, or one of them, to whom He has trusted the work of restoring young Vernet to his parents and his rights, and of bringing to account the villain who has kept him from them."

Finding nothing more that he wanted, the detective closed and locked that drawer, and then explored the others. But he found nothing of importance, and turned to go.

On opening the door, which he did rather suddenly, with an object, perhaps, in so doing, Mrs. Seeds came sprawling in upon the floor.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he made haste to say. "Had I known that you had your eye glued to the keyhole, I would have opened the door more carefully."

Mrs. Seeds was very much confused.

"I—I was just stooping to pick up something I dropped," she explained.

"Allow me to pick it up for you," said the detective, gallantly, and he assisted the blushing landlady to her feet.

Mrs. Seeds knew the detective—by sight, at least, having seen him at the Tombs police court on the occasion of her son's trial some months before, and she now implored him to use his influence to save her "darling Jimmie" from prison.

The detective informed her, however, that he could do nothing.

The woman's manner changed instantly. She had been all smiles before, but now burst forth into a tirade of vituperation and abusiveness, from which the detective escaped by departing in haste.

From there he went to the home of the Mrs. O'Brien who made her debut in a previous chapter, and found the lady at home.

"Phat do yez be wantin'?" she asked, recognizing him instantly.

"When Mrs. Barker died, some months ago," said the detective, "you took her household things to keep them until called for. When they were called for, however, you failed to give up all of them, and—"

"Ye're a liar!" screamed the woman. And for about two minutes her tongue ran at lightning speed, and stopped only when she was out of breath. Then the detective resumed, as though he had not been interrupted at all:

"—And I have called for the rest. I want everything that was in Mrs. Barker's trunk, and especially a letter which was addressed to her boy, Harold Vernet."

"I tell yez I have nothin'!" the woman cried. "An' even if I had anything, bedad! I wouldn't give it up to the likes av *you*!"

"Very well, Mrs. O'Brien; I have here a search-warrant," and the detective took from his pocket the one he had obtained to search Macy Blanding's room, "and I will have to look for the things myself."

The Irishwoman grew suddenly pale. She saw that the detective meant business, and it was evident that she did not desire to have him explore her rooms. The detective thought so, at all events, and instantly played a trump.

"And, Mrs. O'Brien, if you force me to do that, I may discover more than you would care to have the police know," he said.

"No fear av that!" she exclaimed. "But, as ye have a warrant wid ye, av course I'll have to own up an' surrender th' things. I've no wish to offend th' perlice. Step in an' wait jest a moment, sor, an' I'll bring thim to ye, every bit."

"That is your safest course," the detective said, as he entered the room and sat down.

The woman disappeared into an adjoining room, but soon returned with a letter in one hand and a small bundle in the other.

The detective took the letter, examined it, thrust it into his pocket, and then asked:

"What is in the bundle?"

"Only some av Mrs. Barker's old clothes, sor; not av much account at best."

"Open it."

The woman obeyed, and it was as she said.

"Are you sure there are all?"

"Yis, sor."

"Well, keep them. The letter was what I wanted. In future, however, be careful not to take what does not belong to you." And the detective went away, Mrs. O'Brien shaking her fist after him the moment he closed the door.

Thence he proceeded to the Chambers street Hos-

pital, where he made inquiries concerning one Hellen Varrick.

The record was examined, and the name found. "Hellen Varrick, age forty-one, admitted January 2, 18—. Died January 12, of the same year. Cause of death—consumption."

"Can you give me the name of the nurse under whose care she was placed?" the detective asked.

The nurse was soon ascertained to have been a Miss Scottley, but it was found that she was no longer connected with the hospital.

"I'll tell you what I'm after," the detective said. "I want to find whether Hellen Varrick wrote a letter just before she died, and if so, what became of it."

"Well," said the hospital official, "the person most likely to know about that, is the nurse. I will make inquiries, and perhaps I can learn where she is." And tapping a bell as he spoke he summoned an assistant, whom he sent to bring one of the lady nurses, whom he named.

"She used to be quite intimate with Miss Scottley," he explained, "and perhaps knows where she is living now."

The nurse soon appeared, and in answer to the question, said:

"Miss Scottley is now Mrs. Bell, sir, and lives at No. — Sixth avenue."

Thither the detective went.

He found Mrs. Bell to be a neat-looking little woman, with a very pleasant face.

Introducing himself, he stated his business, and the lady said:

"I remember Hellen Varrick, sir, and she *did* write a letter, which I promised to deliver when she died. And I did so. I took it to an American District Telegraph office, and sent it to its destination by a messenger boy. I remember it well. It was an awful night."

"Is this the letter?" the detective asked, showing her the one he had found in Macy Blanding's room.

"Yes, sir; it is the same. I recognize it by the envelope, which I directed for the woman at her request. But, there was more than this letter in the envelope then, sir."

"What else was in it?"

"There was a piece of a child's neck-chain, and also something which I thought to be part of a child's little dress."

"Can you direct me to the office where you left the letter for delivery?"

The woman gave him the address, and thanking her, he started for down-town again.

Arriving at the telegraph office, which was the one where our hero was employed, he found a new manager in charge.

He made known his business, and the books were examined. Turning to the entries of January 12, the following memorandum was found:

"Article: a letter. Value: unstated. Time: 7:50 P. M. Address: Mrs. Landon Giles, No. — Fifth avenue. Sender: Miss Scottley, Chamber-street Hospital. Messenger: H. Vernet."

And in another column was the remark:

"This letter was lost, owing to the messenger, being assaulted en route."

In that direction the detective's task was done. The remainder of the afternoon he spent at headquarters, and at his home.

Mrs. Smith, Harry, and Joe, were about sitting down to their evening meal, in their humble home, when Dick burst into the room, exclaiming:

"If it ain't an outrage, then nothin' ever was! Hal Vernet is discharged!"

"Discharged!" exclaimed the widow, and Harry at once. "What for?"

"Why, for not delivering that parcel last night! There is a new manager at the station to-day, and he reported the case at once to the superintendent, who ordered Hal to be dismissed. You know he lost a letter last winter, too; and they say there was a man at the office this afternoon making inquiries about it."

"Oh! that is really too bad!" said Mrs. Smith. "But, I suppose he will be able to find something to do."

"Of course he will," said Harry. "But it is too bad to have him lose so good a place."

"Well, we will see now what Detective Sharp will do for him, anyhow," said the widow.

"Oh!" cried Dick. "I never once thought of him. He'll get Hal a place, you bet!"

At that moment there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," cried the widow, and a young man entered the room. It was the "Squirrel."

"Are you Mrs. Smith?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you are the lady I was sent to find. Detective Sharp desires you and your boys, Harry, Dick and Joe, to be at his house, No. — West — street, at eight o'clock this evening. You must not fail to be there. He desires also to have you bring the things that belong to Harold Vernet—the baby-dress, chain, and so forth. He says he has a surprise in store for you. Will you be there?"

"Of course we will!" shouted the boys. "Tell him so, mother!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Smith, "we will be there at that time."

"All right," assented the "Squirrel," and he went out.

Then you may believe that everything was excitement in the Smith family.

About the same time that the "Squirrel" called at Mrs. Smith's, the following note was delivered to Mr. Giles, at his Fifth avenue mansion:

"MR. GILES:—Do not be alarmed about your boy. He is with me. If you and Mrs. Giles will come to my house at eight o'clock this evening, you will find him there. Do not fail to come, as I have an important secret to disclose. Your diamonds are safe.

Respectfully yours,
"STEVEN SHARP."
"No—West—street."

CHAPTER XVI. CONCLUSION.

ABOUT eight o'clock that evening, several persons were seated in a comfortably-furnished parlor in Detective Sharp's house. They were Mr. and Mrs. Giles; Mrs. Smith and her three sons, Harry, Dick, and little Joe; and Mrs. Sharp, the detective's wife, who was entertaining the company awaiting the appearance of her husband.

A clock on the mantle had barely ceased striking the hour, when the detective entered the room, and introducing his guests to his wife, and to one another, he then said:

"You no doubt think it strange that I have requested you to come here this evening, sir and madam," addressing Mr. and Mrs. Giles, "but I have a great disclosure to make to you. The boy whom you believe to be yours, and who stole the diamonds from Mrs. Giles's jewel-box, is not your son."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Giles were as pale as death. "How do you know this?" Mr. Giles demanded. "If you will favor me with your attention for a few minutes," the detective answered, "I will explain all."

"About fourteen years ago you had in your service a woman named Hellen Varrick. She suddenly disappeared, and with her your only child, a year-old boy. You informed the police, and employed private detectives; but not the slightest trace of either the woman or the child was ever discovered. "What became of them, I will tell you."

"On January 12, of this year, the woman died in the Chambers street Hospital; and just before her death she wrote this letter, which, madam, is addressed to you:

"CHAMBERS STREET HOSPITAL, }
"New York, January 12, 18—."

"MRS. GILES:—I am dying. My hours on earth are few. What I have to say to you I must make haste to write, ere it is forever too late. When I stole your baby, fourteen years ago, I must have been demented. I now repent for the act, and, if I could, would gladly restore him to you; but I know not where he is. I kept half of his little dress and half of his neck-chain, which I send to you with this letter. Perhaps by these you may even now be able to find him. I gave him to an honest-looking woman whom I met on the street. I did not know her, but trusted her face. In my heart I did not wish harm to come to the child. I asked the woman to hold him for me a moment, and when she took him from my arms I ran away. Poor boy! if he is still living he is now fifteen years old! May God forgive me! Your forgiveness I dare not ask."

"Now to confess why I took the child, and oh! the shame I feel when I think of it! I loved your husband. I loved him sincerely—nay, madly; but he thought no more of me than of the earth under his feet. While you—Oh! how I hated you! you were the very light of his life. How it maddened me! I tried every means to make him notice me, but in vain. I was merely a servant, nothing more. Then I thought to have revenge by stealing your child and thus breaking your heart."

"My strength is failing. I must stop. I address this to you. Do not let your husband see it. My earnest prayer is that God may guide your boy Henry to you."

HELLEN VARRICK."

"That woman's prayer was heard," the detective said, as he folded the letter, "and from the moment when this missive left her hands, its course was directed by the hand of Providence."

"The letter was taken to an American District Telegraph station, and left to be forwarded to you; but before it reached its destination it was lost."

"It was found by one Macy Blanding, a thief and villain, who opened it and made himself acquainted with its contents."

"Macy Blanding had a boy living with him at the time, named Ikey Moses—a son of Levi Moses, alias Sheeny the Turk."

"One of the men who entered my house last night!" Mr. Giles exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. Well, Blanding put the boy under severe training for several months, and at last brought him to you and presented him as your lost child."

"Oh! the villain!" cried Mrs. Giles, who was now weeping.

"He represented himself as Hellen Varrick's brother," the detective continued, "and said he had always believed the boy to be his sister's child. But, she having confessed the truth at her death, he lost no time in restoring the boy to you, glad to know that he was not a child of his sister's shame. The boy had his lessons perfectly learned, and you believed the story. While for proof, Blanding gave you the parts of the dress and chain which he had stolen from the letter."

"Am I right?"

"You are," admitted Mr. Giles. "We had to believe him. His story, backed by the proof he brought us, was not to be doubted. If we had a doubt, we were obliged to crush it and take the boy to our hearts."

"The woman with whom your child was left," the detective resumed, "was a hard-working Christian, whose name was Aunt Polly Barker."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith, as the

truth which she had more than half-suspected burst suddenly upon her; "it was Hal!"

"So it was!" cried Dick.

"Yes," confessed the detective, "Hal it was. But be patient and hear me out."

And, turning again to Mr. and Mrs. Giles, he went on:

"Mrs. Barker took the baby boy home with her, and, having then no children of her own, kept him. When he was old enough to go to school he was sent, and received quite a good English education."

"When he was about ten years of age, however, Mrs. Barker's husband died, and then Mrs. Barker had to take him from school and put him at work. At first he tried blacking boots, then selling papers, and at last became a messenger boy in the American District Telegraph. And he it was who set out to carry Hellen Varrick's letter to you, but lost it. How it was lost, I will explain presently."

"Last winter Mrs. Barker died, and then the boy was thrown upon the world alone; but he soon found friends. Mrs. Smith and her boys took him into their home, and they love him as a son and brother."

"My God!" Mr. Giles suddenly cried; "was he the boy who gave the alarm at my house last night?"

"Yes, sir. How did you guess it?"

"Why, I asked him to stay in my house all night, but he refused, saying Mrs. Smith would be anxious about him. I just thought of it when you mentioned her name."

"Well, then, inasmuch as you have already seen the boy," said the detective, "I will now present him to you. I was holding him back to give you a grand surprise."

And he rose and left the room, soon returning with Hal Vernet and Ikey Moses.

"This lad, sir and madam," he said, leading Hal forward, "is your lost son. There is no doubt in the case. I will prove it to you clearly. Were all other proofs wanting, though, his remarkable likeness to you, madam, would convince any one. I noticed something familiar in your face the first time I saw you, madam, and wondered where I had seen the same face before. It was your son's face I had seen."

Mrs. Giles had caught Hal in her arms and was pressing him to her. In her heart she knew the detective's story was true.

"Now," said the detective, "for the proof." And he proceeded to explain, in his clear, straightforward manner, the facts which are known to the reader.

He read the letter which was written by Aunt Polly Barker and addressed to Hal Vernet, and which Mrs. O'Brien had found in the old trunk; he produced the boy's baby-clothes, which were at once recognized by Mrs. Giles; he took the note signed H. V. from the lining of the little cloak and compared the writing with Hellen Varrick's letter, proving it to be hers. It was, altogether, proof enough to have satisfied any tribunal in the world.

Then he handed Mrs. Giles her diamonds, explaining how they had been stolen and recovered.

He told how "Sheeny the Turk" had followed Macy Blanding, and thus discovered where his boy was; how he had met the boy on the street, and commanded him to steal; and how the boy had taken the diamonds and delivered them to his father.

He explained how Hal had lost Hellen Varrick's letter; how Macy Blanding had discovered who he was; how Blanding, the "Turk," and "Seedy Jim" had planned to kill him, and how Hal had seen the "Turk" conceal something under the hearth, and heard him and "Soft Patter" plan to rob Mr. Giles's house.

Then he explained how Ikey had opened the door for his father after the house was closed for the night; how Hal had escaped and given the alarm; how the diamonds were found by him—in short, the whole story.

"Of real detective work in this case," he said, "there has been but little. Kind Providence has guided your son to you, and the boy has been in the main his own detective."

It was an affecting scene. Mrs. Giles, Mrs. Smith, Hal, Dick, and little Joe all were crying. Why they cried they could not tell, but they cried nevertheless.

Mr. Giles grasped the detective's hand and shook it heartily, proclaiming him to be a wonderful man, and swearing eternal friendship to him.

As for Hal, he was overjoyed to find his parents, but quite reluctant to part with Mrs. Smith and the boys.

Ikey Moses, poor, homeless boy that he was! stood apart from the others, his eyes glistening with tears.

"What is to be done with this lad?" the detective asked.

"He deserves to be turned out into the street," decided Mr. Giles, indignant at the thought of the part the boy had played.

"Would you turn him out to become a thief like his father?" Hal asked.

"No! no!" pled Mrs. Giles, "we must not do that."

"The right thing to do," declared Hal, "is to take care of him, find him a place to work, and let him have a chance to grow up to be honest."

"What our son says," declared Mr. Giles, "is clearly our duty. The boy shall go home with us, and I will take care of his future. The kind Father who has restored our son to us, now demands of us that we care for this poor lad in return."

The story is told.

The detective's apprentice accepted his true name,

Henry Giles, though he is still called "Hal," as of old. He, Dick Smith, and Ikey Moses are at school, preparing for college. May they grow up to be useful and honored men!

Harry Smith has established a printing-office of his own, and is doing well. He, Mrs. Smith, and little Joe live in a neat cottage in a pleasant New Jersey town—said cottage being a present from Mr. Giles.

Dan Emmery, Hal's friend, is now a clerk in a down-town wholesale store. His prospects are good.

James Seeds, "Seedy Jim," was sentenced to 2 months on the Island. When he came out, Mr. Giles, at Hal's request, secured him a home with a farmer out West, where he has every chance to reform.

"Sheeny the Turk," "Soft Patter," and Macy Blanding are serving out sentences in prison.

Detective Sharp is still on the force, and his adventures are numerous. The case he most frequently speaks of, however, is the one in which he tells his friends about Harold Vernet, the detective's apprentice.

THE END.

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